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THE ARIZONA SERIES

OFF THE RESERVATION

THE ARIZONA SERIES

STORIES *of the* STIRRING DAYS *of* 1885

BY

EDWARD S. ELLIS

1. OFF THE RESERVATION, or
Caught in an Apache Raid
 2. TRAILING GERONIMO, or
Campaigning with Crook
 3. THE ROUND UP, or
Geronimo's Last Raid
-

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THE HOLD-UP.

THE ARIZONA SERIES

Off the Reservation

—OR—

Caught in an Apache Raid

By EDWARD S. ELLIS

Author of "Deerfoot Series," "Boy Pioneer Series,"
"Log Cabin Series," "Up and Doing Series," "Foreign
Adventure Series," "Bound to Win Series," "Paddle
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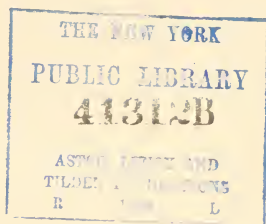
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OFF THE RESERVATION

A STORY OF ARIZONA IN 1885

CHAPTER I

A PLOT

SILAS GOODALE was the father of twins and very proud of both. At the time I introduce you to them, they were a little more than seventeen years old. Minnie was the daughter and Robert, or "Bob" as he was always called, the son. Both had forgotten their mother, but no children ever loved a parent more sincerely, or was loved more deeply in return than was the tie of affection which bound them to the father, and the father to them, and the children to each other.

Goodale was the owner of a fine farm in Central Pennsylvania and was in good circum-

stances. He was content and happy thus to live, so long as his boy and girl were spared to him, though he knew that in the course of time, Minnie, and probably Bob, would pass from under his roof forever. He dreaded to think of their marriage, though he hoped that when that era arrived for either or both, some way would be found for keeping them within easy call, if not within his own home.

In order to understand the incidents of the following pages, I must make clear several facts without which the narrative would be confusing.

Silas Goodale and his brother Hiram, two years younger, served throughout the great Civil War, both being fortunate enough to pass through, without a scratch, the many terrific battles in which they took part. The elder came east and settled in the Keystone State, but Hiram, who was of a roving disposition, drifted westward and finally made his home in southeastern Arizona, where, like his brother, he prospered and became the owner of a fine ranch. He married an excellent young woman, whose given name was Minnie, and for whom the daughter of his brother in Pennsylvania was named.



At intervals of two or three years, Hiram came eastward and spent several weeks with Silas. Having no children of his own, he grew fond of his nephew and niece, while they were as warmly attached to him. There is no comradeship like that of the battlefield, or that which is formed by association in danger, and when to this is added the ties of actual blood brotherhood, you can understand the affection which bound the bronzed brothers together. Each had tried to persuade the other to settle near him, but neither could yield and the arguments had long since been given up.

Hiram Goodale always drew attention and admiration to himself, not so much because of his striking attire, but because of his many peculiar accomplishments. He was a superb rider, a wonderful shot with rifle or revolver, and of such sunshiny disposition that the little children of the neighborhood formed a fondness for him. Hiram did not crave fame or prominence, and when he made his eastward journeys, conformed, so far as he could bring himself to conform, to the conventionalities. He could not consent to cut off his long curling locks, nor to wear a waistcoat, and he felt more comfortable with his trousers tucked

in the tops of his fine, calfskin boots, with their high, narrow heels. He missed the spurs which formed a part of them, but he resolutely unfastened and kept them in his dress-suit case until he left the train in the West, and was ready to leap upon his bronco and dash away with the speed of the wind across the sandy plains.

Perhaps you can understand what a hero Uncle Hiram became to Minnie and Bob, especially in the eyes of the latter. The boy sat fascinated on the porch of his home, on the clear moonlit nights, or in the sitting room, when the weather was chilly, and listened with bated breath to the ranchman's stories of the rough life in the Southwest, where, at that time, the white men were always in more or less peril from the Apaches, the most terrible Indians that ever scourged our continent. Under Uncle Hiram's tutelage the twins grew to be splendid riders, and the skill of Minnie with a revolver was scarcely second to that of her brother.

The parting words of the good fellow on one of these visits were:

"The next time I come, you must let me take Bob back with me."

They were spoken with a laugh and half in jest, but rarely were words more fraught with momentous consequences.

Bob himself treasured them. Minnie would have been glad to accompany her brother on such a journey, but her eagerness could bear no comparison to his. She had just finished her graduating term at a fashionable school in Philadelphia, and she enjoyed the visits she made to her numerous friends, as well as those she received in her delightful home on the banks of the Susquehanna.

Such being the situation, Bob persuaded Minnie to join with him in coaxing their father to allow him to go back with Uncle Hiram, who was now due almost any day.

"But, Bob, what shall *I* do while you are away?" asked the sister reproachfully.

"I don't expect to be gone long; you will be visiting your girl friends in Philadelphia and they will be visiting you, and, before you really miss me, I shall be back again."

"Before I miss you!" she repeated, placing one arm over his shoulder and kissing the ruddy cheek of the youngster, who affectionately returned the salute; "you ought to be ashamed to talk that way."

"So I am and I don't mean it, but you are selfish to think only of yourself."

"It is father who will feel the worst; you don't think of *him*."

"Yes, I do, but if he doesn't think of *me*, then he must be selfish."

"There's no resisting you, Bob; have you asked him?"

"Well, not directly, but, when he told me he was expecting Uncle Hiram, I sighed, looked as miserable as I could, and said I couldn't understand how any one leading such a lovely life as he does, could bear to leave his ranch for even a few weeks."

"What did father say?"

"He didn't say anything; he just grinned, and when I fixed my longing gaze on his face, he actually winked at me. What do you think he meant by *that*?"

"You will have to ask him, but it strikes me he probably meant you couldn't fool him by any such tricks."

"Say, Minnie," added the brother in an eager undertone, as they seated themselves on the piazza; "I think I have a big scheme that will fetch him."

"Let me hear it."

"You won't give me away?"

"No; honor bright."

"I'll lose my appetite—"

"Mercy! how can you do *that*," she broke in; "when you eat more than father and I together?"

"Can't you understand? I'll pretend to lose my appetite; I will mince the food at the table, sigh and look pale and be low-spirited."

"How will you manage to grow pale? It can't be you really intend to half-starve yourself?"

"That's the hard part of the business; of course I shall have to eat as much as ever, but I want to arrange with you to bring my victuals to me secretly, being careful that father shan't suspect it; then I'll get Doctor Browne to suggest to father that I need a change of air to keep me from going into a decline. About that time Uncle Hiram will come along and I'll let him in on the ground floor, and he'll persuade father that the only way he can keep his darling boy with him is to let him go from him for awhile. Don't you think that is a big scheme, sister?"

"I don't think much of it."

"Why not?"

"In the first place, everything depends upon your looking pale and run down; if you eat as much as ever, how are you going to get into that condition?"

"Seems to me you are always trying to find objections to anything I suggest; I don't believe you care half as much for me as you pretend," said Bob in an offended tone.

The sister broke into low, silvery laughter, and, reaching across from her chair, pinched the round chubby cheek.

"*Now* you ought to beg my pardon; I am trying to show you the weakness in your plan; the only way for you to grow pale and thin is to stop eating altogether, or to take just enough food to keep life in your body; are you prepared to do that?"

The youth thoughtfully rubbed his chin.

"Gee! that is the toughest part of the business; here it is only the middle of the afternoon and I'm as hungry as a bear."

"The only thing for you to do is to experiment; don't eat any dinner to-night, and don't swallow a mouthful to-morrow; then come to me and let me know how you feel."

"I won't be able to do that for I'll be dead."

Bob took off his hat, elevated his feet and

rested them on the railing in front, and solemnly scratched his head. Minnie was bubbling over with merriment, but resolutely restrained herself.

"You expect Betty this afternoon?" he abruptly asked.

"She will be here on the early evening train."

"You and she are fond of picnicking; if to-morrow is pleasant, you will take a little ramble in the woods, down near the river; you will carry your lunch with you; be sure you have an extra large amount."

"Why?"

"You think I have got no resolution; I'm going without dinner to-night, if it takes the hair off; to-morrow I will come to the breakfast table with you and father and Betty; I will sip a little coffee and nibble a bit of toast; then I'll heave a sigh clean from my boots, and wander out of the dining-room; you and Betty will feel worried, and tell father that something must be done with me; that I never acted that way before. That will set him to thinking, and if you and Betty put in the right words, he will begin to fancy that after all it may be a good idea for me to go back with Uncle Hiram."

"But what has all this to do with the big lunch you wish me and Betty to take with us to the woods?"

"How stupid you are! Probably by noon, I shall be so weak that I can hardly stagger along the road. I will manage to wobble down to where you and she are picnicking; you see I shall be actually starving by that time and must have food or bid you all an eternal good-by; that's where the big lunch will come in."

"I have no doubt it will all come in, so far as you are concerned. What is to be the next step?"

"I'll come back home, walking slow and feeble-like, sit down here and wait till Sally calls me to lunch. I'll take a seat with father, and this time won't swallow a particle of food; you see there won't be any need of it."

"I should think not, after eating Betty's and my lunch, but I don't see any promise of the alarming paleness on your part."

"I'm afraid I shall have to cut that out."

"Ah," exclaimed Minnie with an excited laugh, "I have it."

"What's that?"

"I'll get Sally to put a coat of whitewash

on your face; there's a bucket of it in the kitchen."

Bob turned a reproachful gaze upon his sister. She was trifling with him. She reached over and patted his knee.

"Don't be offended, dear brother; I fear you are giving yourself a harder task than you can perform."

"I don't understand you."

"After you have put away that lunch to-morrow, it will be quite easy for you to sit down at the table and refuse to partake further; fact is, I don't see how you would be able to eat, but what about to-night and to-morrow morning, when you will have that eternal hunger of yours with you?"

"You don't know what I can do, when I once make up my mind."

"True, and I'm afraid you don't know yourself."

"Just wait and see; when Bob Goodale takes a vow he's going to keep it! You can bet your last dollar on that," was the confident declaration; "but, Minnie, you won't forget to take an extra lunch with you to-morrow," he added anxiously; "gee! I wish it was to-morrow noon now."

While this interesting conversation was going on, Mr. Goodale was seated just within the farthest window which was open. He had sat down to read his newspaper, but becoming interested, he ceased and did not allow a word to escape him. When it had reached the point given, he softly arose and walked out of the room. As he did so he chuckled:

“The young rascal! I’ll teach him a lesson or two.”

CHAPTER II

AN AMATEUR HERO

BETTY TYNDALL arrived at the railway station, a half mile distant, on time, and Bob and his sister Minnie drove thither to meet her. She was a vivacious miss, bubbling over with joviality and high spirits. You would think, after being with her awhile, that such a thing as a serious thought never entered her dancing brain. And yet she was graduated at the head of her class, and her essay, "The Ideals of True Citizenship," attracted general admiration, and several of the leading dailies gave synopses of its most striking points. That, however, should not be remembered against her.

On the way home, Minnie explained the plot which her friend was to aid in carrying out. She eagerly agreed, and Bob felt duly grateful. The little party were home in good time to prepare for dinner. Mr. Goodale welcomed the miss cordially. She had spent

several weeks at his house the preceding summer, and he liked her. He liked every one who was a friend of either of his children.

The opening of the drama, or comedy, as it may be considered, came with the beginning of the dinner. Bob was sure he was never hungrier in his life, and the odor of the food was maddening, but he compressed his lips and braced himself for the ordeal.

"I knew how fond Bob is of roast duck," remarked his father, as he proceeded with his carving at the head of the table; "though the rest of you, including myself, prefer chicken. So I had Sally prepare this fowl specially for Bob, who isn't such a bad fellow as many think."

Having served the others, Mr. Goodale proceeded to shave off several slices of the rich, brown, tender, juicy meat, and to lay them on the plate which Jennie the waitress carried down the table to Bob at the other end. The saucer of pulpy cool apple-sauce was already there, a steaming cup of fragrant coffee nestled beside the sauce, and the plate was piled high with stuffing, mashed potatoes and other vegetables. It was enough to make a hungry person frantic, and there was one

brief moment when Bob wavered and almost fell, but only for an instant.

"Thank you; I don't think I'll take any duck," he said faintly, as he shook his head.

"Sorry," replied his father; "Betty and the rest of us will have to make up for you; Jennie, ask Sally to give you that plate of rice pudding which she has had in the refrigerator all the afternoon; she knows Bob's weakness."

If ever a boy "adored" rice pudding, Bob Goodale did. He almost groaned, but bravely shook his head.

"Nothing for me, thank you, father."

"Going to reform, eh? I have been thinking for the past week or two that you were eating more than is good for you; it may be a wise thing to diet for a few days. But, my! that duck is extra fine," he added, as he pushed a slice apart with his knife and began masticating it; "I do believe it beats the chicken. Won't you try some, Minnie or Betty?"

They declined, pronouncing the chicken beyond compare. The head of the house ate only a little of the duck when he told the waitress to ask Sally to put it away for the morrow. He wasn't sure about the pudding;

perhaps Bob could worry down a few mouth-fuls.

Poor Bob felt that the situation was getting away from him. He was close to the limit; he couldn't hold out much longer.

"If you'll excuse me, I think I'll go out doors and wait on the piazza for you."

"I'm so sorry, Bob," said Betty sympathetically; "I hope you will soon feel better."

"Oh, there's nothing the matter with him," replied his father airily; "he's been eating so enormously that I don't wonder his system rebels; it will be a good thing for him if he will shut off for a few days from everything."

This kind of sympathy was anything but comforting to the youth whose hunger was gnawing seemingly at his very vitals. He felt like resenting it, but held his peace, and passing outside dropped into his chair.

"Gee! how is it going to be in the morning?" was his thought; "I guess this is the first meal I ever missed; I didn't know it went half so hard; I don't see why a fellow has to be hungrier than ever at such a time."

Seated thus, hearing the laughter and chatter within doors, a brilliant scheme gradually took shape in the mind of the youth.

Rising to his feet, he tip-toed down the length of the porch, and softly entered the kitchen where the colored cook Sally was empress. The boy was a favorite with her, and there was nothing he could ask which she would not grant, if it lay within her power to do so. In answer to her look of surprise, he placed his finger on his lips, and said in a half-whisper:

“Sh! don’t let them know I’m here.”

The ebony face expanded into an indulgent smile. She had helped him out of more than one dilemma when he was younger.

“All right; I won’t say nuffin.”

“Where’s that duck?”

“Jes’ tuk it down cellar, and put in de ‘frigerator.”

“If anybody asks where I am, don’t let him know. Mum’s the word.”

He walked softly to the head of the stairs and went silently down the steps. It was so dark that he drew a safety match and struck it on the prepared side of the box. The tiny twist of flame revealed the roast duck almost entire, nestling on a plate beside a huge cube of ice. While feasting his eyes upon it, he became aware of an embracing circle of light,

and looking round, saw that Sally had followed him down cellar with a small oil lamp, which she set on the broad upper side of the refrigerator.

"Here am a knife and fo'k, Bob."

"Thank you, Sally, but I really don't need them."

"And here am a spoon fur de rice puddin' on de oder shelf below; dis am a big spoon," she chuckled; "one dat jes' fits yo' mouf."

"Be sure not to let any one know I'm down here, Sally."

She repeated her promise, and, waddling to the foot of the stairs, went up the steps.

When Bob was through using his knife and fork, nothing but a wreck was left of what had once been a lively duck. As for the pudding, not enough remained to base a remark upon. The youth had eaten his fill.

"It isn't so hard after all to fast," he grimly muttered, as he finished with the napkin, which Sally had furnished him; "it all depends on the point of view as they say. I wonder how Minnie and Betty are making out with father. That doesn't sound as if any of them feel worried about me," he added, as the sounds of merriment reached him from above.

He returned to this place on the porch, and sat down to wait for the others to join him.

Meanwhile, Mr. Goodale was in such high spirits and so full of jest and funny stories that the girls forgot their promise, and in truth seemed to forget Bob altogether, until they passed outside and found him silent and apparently grum in his chair.

"How do you feel, Bob?" asked Betty, flirting her chair beside him on one side, while Minnie did the same on the other side.

"I don't see that it makes any difference to any one how I feel."

"You shouldn't say that," replied the visitor; "you don't know how worried we were."

"Do *you* know? What did father say?"

"I declare we forgot all about what we were to say to him; he talked so much he didn't give us a chance to get a word in edgeways."

"Where is he?"

"I think he went into the kitchen to give Sally some orders."

"He said that duck tasted so good that he wanted to go out and try a little more of it," added Minnie.

A cold shiver ran down the spine of Bob.

This was so out of "form" that he was sure his father must have had some sinister purpose in view. Otherwise, he would have ordered the fowl to be brought to the dining-table.

"Bob," added his sister in a whisper; "you smell like roast duck."

"Girls have too much curiosity," he replied impatiently; "can't you find something else to think about besides me?"

"Not very well," and then her sympathy led Minnie to cease her teasing.

Thus far Bob Goodale had not cut much of a figure as a hero, but I shall soon prove to you that he was made of the right stuff, and deserving of all the praise his friends gave him. He felt a trifle of self-disgust because he had fallen so far short of the task set for himself. He was a little dubious of the impression made on his father, who did not show any signs of worryment over his son's seeming loss of appetite. Bob still hoped to bring the parent round to the desired state of mind.

Bob was resolved on one thing; he would skip his meal the next morning, making sure that his parent was aware of it. He would not eat a particle of food, till he could draw

upon the supply to be furnished the next day at noon by his sister and her friend Betty. Since that nourishment was to be partaken of in the woods, well removed from the home, there was no danger of his father learning or suspecting the truth.

And the young man did his duty bravely. He took his seat at the table with the others the next morning, sipped a little coffee, and then, begging to be excused, withdrew. Betty and Minnie ventured on an expression or two of sympathy, but the head of the family laughed it off, and treated the matter so lightly, that the conversation drifted in other directions. The chief subject was the picnic, which had been arranged the night before. The girls were simply going on a stroll into the cool, shady woods, an eighth of a mile from the house, and on the sloping bank of the river. They would gather wild flowers, wander to and fro as their moods prompted, eat their lunch when they felt hungry, and return home whenever the whim took them. Mr. Goodale expected to be occupied most of the day in looking over some papers, which ought to have received attention before. As he had already remarked, his

brother Hiram was due at any hour. He probably would give no notice of the time of his arrival, but would walk from the station, leaving his trunk to be brought by the hired man.

"I think I'll practice revolver shooting awhile," remarked Bob; "I have a favorite place not far from the spring where you will take lunch, and maybe I'll drop down on you."

This was said with an assumption of indifference, but the youth watched the effect upon his parent, who had lingered to smoke his cigar on the front porch. He did not seem to hear the words and shortly after passed into the house.

Minnie acted like a true sister and Betty gave her much help. Instead of the ordinary small lunch-basket, they carried one large enough to allow a whole custard pie and one of apple to be fitted in place without any danger to their consistency. Then there were sandwiches, hard-boiled eggs and a pan of gingerbread. The lunch, as a whole, would have been very satisfying to three or four able-bodied men. When the two came down the porch carrying the big basket between them

Bob was nowhere in sight. Laying in a good supply of cartridges, he had sauntered off to his practising ground.

It was a delightful spot at which the girls halted, amid the fleecy maples, the fragrant birch, the rugged oaks, the wild cherry and the scrubby pine, with a hollow from the depths of which bubbled a spring of crystalline, cold water, so tempting that the two drank from it at first sight, though neither was aware of any thirst. Then they carefully lifted out the contents of the basket. The rich, pulpy custard pie was gently laid on the leaves at the foot of a birch; the other luxury reposed near at hand; the eggs were piled into a neat cone, with the paper of mixed salt and pepper, and the flaky gingerbread beside it, while the rich yellow quince jelly trembled on the saucer where it reposed, and awaited its fate. Cups, saucers, knives, forks and the rest of the paraphernalia were set with taste, and the prospective feast could not have been made more attractive.

"A single egg apiece will do for us," observed Betty, standing off a few paces, and looking admiringly down on the array; "that will leave three for Bob; Minnie, I never

cared much for gingerbread; I propose that we let him have it all."

"What about the pies?"

"We'll cut a small piece for ourselves; do you think," asked the girl, with sudden alarm, "that there's any danger of Bob injuring himself by eating too much?"

"I have never known him to suffer from anything of the kind; I see no cause for distress over that; no one can deny that Bob has a fine appetite, and there really is more here than he will need. Ah! he has begun his practice."

The remark was caused by the muffled report of a pistol stealing through the forest aisles. Bob often went to this secluded place and sometimes spent hours in practising with his revolver. More than once Minnie accompanied him, for she had a fine weapon of her own, and I believe I have intimated that she attained no little skill in handling it. Indeed, she surprised her brother by her proficiency, which was a high compliment, for few men surpassed Bob in that respect.

CHAPTER III

A TRUE HERO

BETTY and Minnie made a pretty picture, as they strolled among the soft cool shadows, gathering wild roses, brilliant leaves and feathery ferns, which they took back to the spring to form into bouquets and tasteful bundles to be carried home and preserved. They had laid aside their hats, and the luxuriant hair of each dangled below her shoulders and reached to her waist. Both were dressed in spotless white, a large blue sash encircling Minnie, and one equally large forming the girdle of Betty. It was of bright red, tied at the back into a huge bow, with the ends fluttering to the bottom of the short skirt. The two broke into snatches of song, darting hither and thither at sight of some tempting flower, or bit of grass, and their merry laughter filled the forest aisles with the sweetest of music.

At intervals they heard the muffled reports

of Bob's revolver, but did not go to him. The "range" he had chosen removed all danger from stray shots, so long as others kept at a distance. The youth knew where to find his friends and he emerged from among the trees and walked to the spring, while it still lacked a full hour of meridian. His loaded weapon reposed in his hip pocket and he was smiling. As he greeted the two, he took out his watch and looked at it.

"Seems to me it has stopped," he remarked, holding it to his ear; "there! it has begun ticking again; it must be considerably past noon."

"We shall have to depend upon you for the time," said Minnie demurely; "if you think it is noon, we may as well have lunch."

"The most that I can say is that it *feels* like noon, but I don't wish—"

Betty threw up her hands and screamed.

"What's the matter?" asked the startled Bob.

"You have sat down on that custard pie!"

"Gee! I thought the cushion was soft and squashed out a good deal," muttered Bob, hastily scrambling to his feet; "why didn't you warn me?"

"Who dreamed you would do a thing like *that?*" asked Minnie reproachfully, "O Bob! what a sight you are!"

"Never mind," called the laughing Betty; "we can scrape him off."

"It isn't that which hurts me; it's the waste of raw material," bewailed Bob, who placed himself at the disposal of the girls.

"Now, don't sit down on that other pie."

"Don't worry; I'm going to put that where it will do the most good."

Betty and Minnie made an excellent job of it. Bob found it hard to twist his head around and over his shoulder so as to view the result of their labor, in the way of planing him off with the table knives.

"You have done very well, girls; I shouldn't know that anything had happened, except that I feel a little cool in moving about. Being there is so much danger from my awkwardness, the best thing we can do is to get the whole lunch out of the way."

It was done. There was abundance for the three and you need not be told that each—especially Bob—enjoyed it to the full. When they were through, enough fragments remained for another feast.

"When are you going home?" asked Bob.

"Oh, after awhile; there's no hurry."

"Suppose you go to my range with me and try your hand at shooting. Betty, you don't know what a good shot Minnie has become; I'll give you a few lessons."

The three set out in Indian file, Bob leading. They had some two hundred yards to traverse, and were no more than fairly started, when Betty called out:

"I'll bring my hat; do you want yours, Minnie?"

"No; leave it by the spring."

The brother and sister were strolling forward, walking slowly so as not to get too far from their friend, when both were startled by a wild outcry from the girl.

"O Bob! Save me! save me!"

Astounded and wondering what it could all mean, the youth dashed toward the point whence the appeal came, closely followed by the terrified Minnie.

Betty had passed just beyond the field of vision, and Bob had taken less than a dozen steps, when he saw their friend running toward them, her hair flying and in a panic of fright.

"Keep back, Minnie; I'll attend to him!" said the brother, who was going at the top of his speed; "don't get in my way."

Bob saw what it all meant. Betty had reached the spring, and was stooping to pick up her hat, when she heard a cavernous muttering behind her. Flashing a look to the rear, she saw a bull, with head lowered, mouth dripping with grass, pawing the soft earth and flinging the dirt over and behind him. He was a vicious brute, like many of his kind, and the sight of the red sash had roused him to fury.

He was hardly twenty paces distant, and was giving notice that he meant to charge upon the girl who wore the offending color. Even while she stared, helpless for the moment, he began approaching on a walk. It was then that she cried out and ran toward her friends, as fast as she could hurry between the trees, which were comparatively free from undergrowth.

At first the bull trotted, and his speed was about the same as that of the fugitive. Then he broke into a gallop and gained fast, emitting his threatening bellows and evidently in the ugliest mood conceivable.

At sight of Bob coming to her rescue Betty was so overcome that she flung up her hands and fell headlong. He was so near that one leap lifted him over her body, and brought him face to face with the savage animal. His revolver was in his hand, and leveling it at the head of the brute, he fired three chambers as fast as he could pull the trigger.

And every bullet struck home. The bull flung up his head, shortened his bellows, blinked his eyes confusedly, wobbled about and was staggering uncertainly forward, when Bob slipped to one side and let fly again twice in succession. This time the pellets of lead entered just behind the fore leg, and when the ravening brute went down, he remained down.

"There, my fine fellow," said Bob, "you won't be bothered by any more red sashes; get up, Betty; all danger is over."

It was several minutes before the girl understood how she had been saved from a dreadful death. When she clasped the hand of Minnie, Bob had placed the last cartridge in his revolver. She was still so faint that she sat down on the leaves, while the youth who

had shown himself a true hero rallied her on her adventure.

"I wonder whether he could have overtaken you; I did not know how fast you can run, Betty."

"You never had an awful bull chase you like that."

"Yes, I have, and it was the same bull, too; he belonged to us; he has always been an ugly fellow; he caught me one day when I was crossing the upper meadow. I was near the middle of the field, and those who saw me run said I would have taken the prize at a county fair; we got to the fence at the same time and he helped me over,—though I didn't need any help. If I had had my pistol with me, that would have been the last of Mr. Bull. When I told father he laughed and said it would teach me to keep my wits about me. He doesn't look fierce," added Bob, surveying the lifeless form, "and he isn't very big, but I never saw a meaner creature. I'm glad you gave me an excuse for shooting him, for I owed him a grudge and he was likely at any time to kill a person."

"Are there any more bulls around?" timidly asked Betty, glancing to the right and left.

“Not in this neighborhood; even if there were, wouldn’t you feel safe with me and my revolver? You ought to have more confidence in me.”

Before Betty could make the protest Bob was fishing for, a chuckling laugh caused the three to turn their heads. From among the trees a sturdy figure, fully six feet in height, walked into view. He wore a broad-brimmed hat with rattlesnake band, a hickory shirt with flowing silk tie, no waistcoat, loose short coat, and had a belt drawn around his narrow waist, while the coarse brown trousers were tucked in the tops of the finest of calf-skin boots, which had narrow, high heels.

The man wore a goatee and mustache, and his long, curly, grizzled hair which was shoved behind his ears, clustered over his shoulder. The blue eyes were as bright and clear as those of Bob Goodale, though his age was three times that of the lad. With the politeness natural to him, he doffed his hat and called in a cheery voice, as he strode forward with extended hand:

“Howdy, my young friends? I’m powerful glad to see you all.”

“O Uncle Hiram!” called Minnie, bounding

forward, throwing her arms about his neck and affectionately kissing him; "how glad we are to see you!"

Bob shook hands, and Minnie introduced the bronzed ranchman to Betty, who pleased all by rising on toes to receive the fatherly kiss.

"We have been expecting you for several days," added Bob; "father said you might come at any hour."

"I was kept longer than I expected in Philadelphia; the distance is so short from the station that I preferred to stretch my legs by walking than to ride."

"How was it you left the road and came over into the woods?" asked Minnie.

"I was taking things easy, when I heard some one scream; then came the sounds of a revolver, and I thought there might be a game I could get into, though I didn't have any pistol with me, 'cause the folks in the East are so partic'lar, they won't let a fellow carry one of them things without a permit; so I hustled. Looks to me," added Hiram Goodale, as he glanced at the carcass of the bull, "as if there had been something doing in these parts."

He was told of the incident.

"May I have the pleasure?" he asked, when Minnie and Betty had finished their glowing story. As he spoke, he extended one hand to Bob and with the other removed his hat and gravely bowed. The youth blushed, for praise from this veteran of the plains was praise indeed.

"How long can you stay with us this time, uncle?" asked Bob, more with a view of diverting the compliments than anything else.

"Only two or three days; I have spent more time on the road than usual and must get back to the ranch as soon as possible; I hope, Bob, to take you with me."

The eyes of the lad flashed.

"It is the dearest wish of my life, uncle, but I'm afraid you can never get the consent of father."

"I'm not so sure of that," remarked the man with a meaning which sent a thrill through the heart of Bob Goodale.

"What makes you think so, uncle?"

"Think how?"

"That you can take me back with you."

"I have been writing to your father; in the last letter I sent him, which was from Chicago,

I told him I should insist on taking you to Arizona for a visit to me."

"What did he say to that?" .

"He hasn't had a chance to say anything; I have come for his answer; we'll talk it over to-night."

This statement being analyzed did not contain much comfort after all. Uncle Hiram had merely expressed himself more pointedly than usual to his brother, and had no means of knowing what the reply would be. Betty proposed they should adjourn to the spring, beyond sight of the carcass, which she could not look upon without a shiver, and there talk over the subject that was so dear to the heart of Bob.

Accordingly, they went thither and seated themselves on the ground. By this time, it was near mid-day, and Uncle Hiram, at the suggestion of his young friends, made his lunch upon what remained from the meal of the others. Like many of his class, he was a small eater, and declared himself fully satisfied, after he had topped off with a cup of the clear, cold water.

Inasmuch as it was necessary to make a confidant of the ranchman, Minnie told him

everything, even to the attempt of her brother to pretend he had lost his appetite. The man threw back his head and made the woods ring with laughter.

"That won't work, Bob; in fact it will hinder your getting your father's consent."

"How?"

"Why, I couldn't ask him to let me take you away from home while you were ill, or showed signs of becoming so."

"The idea was that he would think that was the way to cure me."

"It's just as likely he would fear it was the worst thing he could do; you may as well give up that tom-foolery, Bob."

"I'll be glad to do so," replied the youth with such eagerness that every one smiled.

"I'll tackle Silas to-night, and will tell you to-morrow morning whether I'm to have your company for a little while in Arizona; it strikes me we may as well go home, or, if you prefer to stay longer, I'll go alone. Remember, I haven't seen my only brother for more than two years."

CHAPTER IV

THE MAN FROM ARIZONA

THAT evening the friends whom I have named were gathered round the large table in the sitting-room, chatting and looking over the big photograph album, which belonged to the family, and which contained treasures that no money could buy.

First, in the place of honor, was the wife and mother of the twins who had departed longer ago than either could remember; there were the grandparents, in their quaint, old-fashioned attire; Bob and Minnie, taken a-half dozen times at varying ages; Silas and Hiram, each in the uniform of a captain, one of infantry and the other of cavalry, and made about the time they were mustered out of the military service of their country, when they were twenty years younger than now; there was Aunt Minnie, wife of Hiram, for whom the twin Minnie was named, and then came a lot of schoolmates, boys and girls, mostly

in their teens, in whom the elders felt little interest.

Hiram Goodale was idly turning the lumpy pages, hardly giving a glance at the smooth, smiling faces in their smart costumes when he stopped short.

"Hello! where the mischief did *that* come from?" he asked, looking inquiringly at Minnie. The girl sprang from her chair, came round and looked over his shoulder.

"Why that is Cochita; do you know him?"

"Do I know him? I knew his father, Chief Dracus and we shot at each other more than once; but tell me how the picture of the son comes to be here."

"Cochita has been attending school in the East; he is one of the brightest scholars, or rather was, for he was graduated last spring and has gone back to his tribe."

"What tribe is that?" asked the father of Minnie. The brother answered:

"The Warm Spring Apaches—the same as Geronimo. The father of Cochita was as bad as Mangus the father of Geronimo. Neither had special cause for enmity against the whites, but they plundered and killed through pure deviltry. I was one of half a dozen,

a couple of years ago, who pursued a party of Apaches into the Mogollen Mountains. We lost two men, and when we got through with the dusky squad there weren't any left. I always suspected it was my shot that wound up the clock of Dracus, though I could never be quite certain."

"And at that time his son Cochita was a civilized Indian studying at school and delighting his teachers by his gentleness and brightness," said Minnie.

Hiram Goodale held the album to the light and studied the features closely.

"I can see a resemblance to his father, one of the greatest leaders the Warm Spring Apaches ever had. The son is much the better looking; in fact he may be called handsome. Where did you meet him, Minnie?"

"He was quite popular in society in Philadelphia; I was introduced to him at a ball and he was my partner."

"Yes," added Betty with a laugh, "and we all agreed that he was a great admirer of yours; he asked me about you, and it was to oblige him that I took one of your photos without your knowledge (though I don't

know that that was necessary) and let him have it. Then he made bold to forward you his, and I notice you didn't return it."

"Why should I? He was always the chivalrous gentleman in my presence, and never said a word or gave a look to which any one could object. He told me that when he got through with school, he was going back among his people to devote the rest of his life to civilizing and uplifting them. Isn't it a noble mission? Uncle, what are you smiling at?"

The visitor was on the point of replying, when, without ceasing to smile, he looked in the face of his brother and winked. A wink may mean a good many things, and the brother couldn't fathom the meaning of the visual signal. The visitor turned to his niece and said:

"Nothing; there are a good many queer things in this world, but the queerest I ever heard of was the son of old Dracus becoming civilized and a Christian. If the eastern schools can do that for the Indians, it is one of the biggest achievements of the nineteenth century and I wish them Godspeed."

"Did you ever see Cochita?" asked Minnie of her uncle.

"Yes; I saw him when he was a little codger; he was on a raid, and promised to be as devilish as his daddy; it is believed that when in his early teens if not before, he shot more than one white person. He was captured once, but looked so young and innocent that Arizona Alf and Long Micah, who made him prisoner—they are both in my employ—set him free. He thanked them in his broken Apache, ran like a jack-rabbit for the rocks among the foothills, taking his gun with him, and as soon as he could drop behind a boulder took deliberate aim at Alf and sent a bullet through his shoulder. Alf and Micah made for him, but he slipped away and—well, that imp is going to uplift his people is he?"

"You don't seem to have much faith in him," remarked the brother.

"Perhaps I'm unjust; I'm sure I hope he will do all he has promised and that his good resolves will hold out, but it will be a long time before I fully trust him. It is hard to teach an old dog new tricks, though he certainly is not an old dog as yet."

The brothers sat late that night on the front porch, smoking, and, as was their custom, when they met after their long separations,

indulging in reminiscences of their army life, when they shared in the perils from which so many of their friends never returned, and had their humorous as well as thrilling and pathetic experiences. Then they came round to what may be called the "Indian question," and the ardent wish of young Bob to accompany his uncle to his western ranch, for a visit more or less extended, according to circumstances.

"Will there ever be peace in the Southwest?" asked the elder.

"It is bound to come sooner or later. We must remember that for all our trouble with the Indians, the white men are blamable. Behind every outbreak and massacre is the same story of broken treaties, swindling agents and violations of pledges by the national government, and the worst of it all is that the really guilty go free while the innocent have to suffer."

"The Apaches seem to be the hardest nut to crack."

"They are; they are the toughest, most treacherous and merciless of all the tribes between Canada and the Gulf. Had I not seen instances myself, I could not believe

the accounts that hundreds tell us. I have seen an Apache lope for half a mile up the steep side of a mountain, without increasing in the slightest degree his respiration; they will go for days without a mouthful of food and only a swallow or two of water; when they must eat or die, they will live on serpents, or kill their ponies, and trot over the blazing plains on foot; they will burrow in the sand where it is hot enough to roast eggs, and ambush a wagon train that passes unsuspectingly within a hundred yards of where the imps are peering through the dirt and watching their victims approach."

"Can't they be run down and exterminated?"

"It has been done in a few cases, but when a party of them find the chase growing too hot, they will scatter, so that, to make the pursuit successful, you must follow each one separately. They will fix upon some point in the mountains, ten or twenty miles away, where they will come together again and resume their raids."

"As I recall, there has been little trouble with the Apaches until within the last dozen years; what then brought it about?"

“The Warm Spring Indians were satisfied with their fine lands in Warm Spring Valley, New Mexico, until 1872. A lot of scoundrelly white men coveted those lands and persuaded the Interior Department to drive out the owners. They were sent to the sterile region around Fort Tularosa, where they could not raise enough from the earth to keep them from starvation. General Howard was so indignant that he had the Warm Spring Indians sent back to their old homes. Everything would have gone well, but a greater blunder than all was made when they were removed to the San Carlos Reservation. The water was brackish, the soil worthless, and, the Chiricahua Apaches, the hereditary enemies of the Warm Spring band, lived there and outnumbered the newcomers almost two to one.”

“Where did Geronimo come in on that deal?”

“He is the leader of the Warm Spring Indians. He inherits his ferocious nature from his father, Mangus Colorado, who was never ill-treated by the whites, but who raged like a tiger up and down the southwestern frontier. I am glad to say that I helped to hoist that

demon over the Great Divide without giving him time to take off his 'boots.' "

"Has Geronimo ever been brought to bay?"

"Yes; he was pursued so vigorously that he seemed to grow tired of being eternally hunted. He declared he would be a hostile no more, and voluntarily came back to the Reservation, where he has been living the life of a good Indian ever since. He has set a fine example to his people, and all has been peaceful and pleasant ever since."

"Will it last?"

Hiram Goodale smoked thoughtfully for a minute or two.

"The best I can answer is that I hope so. When I left home, everything looked as peaceful as here in the heart of Pennsylvania. The Apaches with Geronimo at their head may rush the Reservation any day, but they are treated so well by the army officers that such a break will be without excuse, and I think at times that it will never come, at least not for many months."

"You seemed to be interested in that Cochita whom Minnie met last winter in Philadelphia."

"Yes; I said more than I intended, but

I might have said more. He is one of the Apaches in whom I have no faith whatever."

"You must not forget the training he has among our own people."

"I do not, but he comes of hideous stock; his father was as devilish as Mangus Colorado, and he trained his son as Geronimo was trained. He may believe he has been regenerated and renewed; if he spent the rest of his life among our people he would probably be a model citizen, but when he gets with his own tribe, I believe he will become as bad as his father was. In fact, one of the agents at the Reservation told me a few months ago, that he regarded Cochita as a more dangerous redskin than Geronimo. He is educated and knows the ways of the white men; he is cunning, polished, can simulate and deceive, in a young man or rather chief, for, if he wishes to do so, he can claim leadership through his father; I fear he will be swept away in the rush of the hostiles and become the worst of them all."

"And yet you wish me to let Bob go home with you to that scourged section of the Southwest."

"I do; it is your duty. On my way here,

after writing you from Chicago, I laid out the whole admirable program."

"I suppose, Hiram, I may know what it is," said the elder with mock humility.

"Of course; Bob is not eighteen; you propose to send him to college next year; he is plenty young enough to wait even longer, but let it be next year; he has set his heart on spending a few weeks with me; it will do him good; he will come back invigorated and eager to take up his studies, grateful and anxious to please you. That he is made of the right stuff, he proved by the neat style in which he shot that bull to-day. After he has spent a few weeks, more or less with me, I will send Minnie, my wife, East; she will make you a fair visit, and when she comes to me again, will bring your Minnie with her; that will do the girl good. Finally, Bob and Minnie will return together, and thus we shall make the exchange of visits perfect all round."

"And where shall *I* come in on this program?" asked the smiling brother.

"Some time, just as soon as you are ready, you will come alone, and I shall give you a taste of life that will recall our army days. What do you think of it all, Silas?"

The brother dallied awhile, extracting a little fun by holding off, but, in the end, he said:

"It shall be as you say; Bob may go with you, and if all remains well, he has my permission to remain say a month or so; then your Minnie is to come East and visit us—making a good long visit, and she may take my Minnie with her to your ranch. Her visit, however, must be brief, when Bob and she will return. I don't fancy being deprived of both any longer than is absolutely necessary."

"Thank you, Silas; you are doing a wise thing."

And so it was settled between the brothers. Two weeks later young Bob Goodale arrived at the ranch in Southwest Arizona, accompanied by the uncle.

CHAPTER V

ON THE ROAD TO CORLITA

IT was on a warm sunshiny day early in May, that Hiram Goodale and his nephew, Bob Goodale, left the train of the Southern Pacific at the little station of Raymond, some miles to the eastward of Tucson. The afternoon was young, and Jud Staples, the stage driver, was waiting for such passengers as might wish to journey with him. The stage route led almost due north to the hamlet of Corlita, consisting of a frontier store and two or three squat adobe buildings that had been erected a dozen of years before, when an attempt was made to boom that part of Arizona. The effort failed and the embryo town, which held out high hopes to the projectors, had gone to seed, with only the store and its occupant remaining.

From Raymond to Corlita was twenty miles. Halfway thither the road was cut in two by a small, sluggish stream, the place bearing the

gruesome name of Dead Man's Crossing. Our friends intended to ride in the stage to Corlita, where they would find two ponies waiting to take them to the Goodale ranch, which lay ten miles to the northwest, among the foothills of the Santa Catalina range of mountains, or rather in a spur of the range, which forked to the right and pushed southward beyond the railway line.

The section which I am describing was an ideal one for cattle raising. The level portions abounded with sagebrush, greasewood, and bunch grass. The last has a dried and withered look, but contains a good deal of nutrition. The mountains are pierced by many cañons and numerous streams, on the banks of which flourish cottonwood, scrub oak, and sycamore, while in the higher altitudes are fine growths of live oak and pine. In this productive region, thousands of cattle thrive and are prepared for the eastern market. In the fall of the year many are driven northward to receive their final touches as to condition in the more rugged but not less favoring climate of Montana.

Jud Staples was a "forty-niner," who had drifted up and down the Pacific coast, without

any betterment of his finances, until finally his endless prospecting had brought him to this part of the Southwest. By that time Jud had lost all faith in gold and silver mining, and was glad to get the situation of driver for the stage connecting the railway with the lone station known as Corlita. This was directly after the completion of the line to Tucson. Provided the stage continued operations, nothing was more certain than that Jud would drive it, so long as he could hold the reins over the scraggly team of ponies. He was now three-score, but lean, wiry, strong, and tough as one of the swaying pines which crowned the crest of the Santa Catalina range. Shabby of attire, with stooping shoulders, grizzled beard, bright gray eyes under shaggy brows, he was a type of a class that even then was fast passing away.

The man and the boy were the only passengers for Jud on this sunny afternoon. The stage was a small affair, drawn only by two animals, which was due at Corlita late in the afternoon, and returned each morning to Raymond. The journey was made without change of teams, the only halt being at Dead Man's Crossing, where the animals were

watered and allowed to rest for half an hour.

Everybody knew Jud and there were few persons within a large radius who were not known to him. He recognized Goodale the moment he stepped off the cars. Somehow or other, Jud had learned that the rancher had been an officer during the Civil War, and he never forgot the title, though he persisted in promoting the ex-captain.

"I'm mighty glad to see you back, Colonel," he said in his hearty way, as he came down the platform, with his whip dangling from his left hand, and extended his right in greeting to his old acquaintance.

"And I'm mighty glad to see you again, Jud, and to get home. Have you any news for me?"

"Nothing that I know of that's worth the tellin'; who is this you have brought back?"

"My nephew, Bob Goodale; you have heard me speak of my brother in the East; this is his boy, who is going to make me a visit."

"Right glad to see you, my son," said the grinning Jud, extending his hand to Bob, who shook it warmly. "My! Colonel, he's a

likely looking younker, and it won't do him any harm to say so afore him; must take after his father instead of his uncle."

And the old man chuckled over his joke, thrusting the butt of his whipstalk against the side of the rancher. Bob blushed and felt drawn toward the honest fellow, who was so outspoken in his sentiments.

"My father and uncle look enough alike to pass for twins, and I shall never be as good looking as either; you know I'm only a tender-foot and am making my first trip to this side of the mountains."

I may say at this point that Bob Goodale was a youth who would have drawn admiring attention anywhere. He was rather tall, sinewy, muscular, graceful, with strong, regular features, bright eyes, short, dark hair, and a fine, attractive face. He was athletic and powerful for one of his years and had a sunny good-nature that made him friends wherever he went.

On their way westward, he and his uncle had stopped at Albuquerque, where, at the suggestion of the elder, Bob was rigged out in a costume more suitable for the section where he expected to spend several weeks. His

uncle called it getting into civilized harness. Even Bob laughed at his own appearance, in his broad-brimmed hat, flannel shirt, with wide collar, gaudy flowing necktie, cartridge belt and holsters, boots and narrow heels. Neither carried Winchesters. The guns were at the ranch, and there were one or two extra ones, so Bob was sure to be provided in that respect.

After chatting a few minutes more, Jud, with the help of the two, strapped the trunks on the rear of the stage, took his seat in front, while his passengers each had one to himself, and the vehicle rattled from the station, whose only occupant, a young man who lived in a shack, was as alone most of the time as if afloat in the middle of the Atlantic.

Bob had provided himself with a fine field glass, slung by a strap around his neck. Everything was so new and strange that he wished to make the best use possible of his eyes. The road was level most of the way, and had been made wholly so by the passing of the stage to and fro for years past. Clumps of sagebrush appeared on every hand, and the bunch grass to which I have alluded was forever in sight. The country to Corlita and

miles beyond may be described as a level plain, with slight rises and sinkings at long intervals. Where the soil was worn more than elsewhere the sand showed. This, during the summer season which was at hand, becomes hot enough to blister the naked foot. In other sections, are stretches where only the prickly cactus finds root, and to the unacclimated person the fervent heat becomes intolerable.

It was about the middle of the afternoon, when the horses, which struck a jogging trot only at brief intervals, descended a slight slope, that rose a little way beyond. Between these inclines wound a stream less than twenty feet wide and no more than two feet deep in the middle. The twisting current was so roiled that the bottom could be seen for only a few inches from shore. It followed in the circumstances that it was tepid and anything but pleasant to drink except to one suffering from thirst.

Jud loosened the bridle reins of his team and drove into the middle of the stream, where the horses were allowed to drink their fill. Then they drew the stage out and paused on the dry land on the other side. Since they had eaten at Raymond, they were not allowed

to crop the bunch grass which grew plentifully around them.

All three left the stage and walked about to stretch their limbs. The long railway ride, followed by the half dozen miles in the stage, had been trying to Hiram Goodale and his nephew. They were accustomed to an active life, and longed to mount their ponies waiting at Corlita and bound away for the home ranch.

"Why is this called Dead Man's Crossing?" asked Bob, facing the two men.

"Jud can answer that better than I," replied the rancher, turning the question over to the grizzled stage driver, who had twitched off a blade of bunch grass and was chewing it.

"I 'spose one reason is that so many white men and redskins have crossed over the Big Divide in this place."

"What first gave it the name?" asked Goodale, for the benefit of his nephew.

"Four years ago this comin' summer, six cow punchers, three of 'em the Dalrymple brothers, heard that Geronimo and Dracus had broke from the Reservation and was raidin' south; the punchers rode out to meet 'em, and they come together on this spot. Old Geronimo had twenty bucks, besides his

squaws and children, and when they seed the boys galloping toward 'em, they laid down behind the top of the slope there to ambush 'em; but the cowboys knowed their bus'ness too well to be fooled. They left their ponies at a safe distance, and crept forward in the sand, so the chances was the same for both sides, 'ceptin' the cow punchers could do the best shootin'. Wal, sonny, when the thing was over, Geronimo and what was left of his band dug dust and got away as fast as they could. Nigh onto one-half of 'em had been wiped out, and three of the cowboys passed in their checks. The queerest thing about that, howsumever, was that not one of the Dalrymple brothers got so much as a scratch, though all of 'em had powerful close calls. Somebody give the place the name of Dead Man's Crossing when the news got out of that scrimmage, and it has stuck ever since."

"And what of Geronimo and Dracus?" inquired Bob.

Jud Staples looked at Hiram Goodale with a grin.

"I reckon he can tell you that better than me."

"I don't know that I can; I will say, how-

ever, that three or four of us heard the firing when we were out looking after the cattle, and rode forward to get into the game. One of our men was shot, but the Apaches were on the fly and we kept them going."

"Did you get any of them, uncle?"

"It couldn't be otherwise in an affair of that kind."

"And what of Dracus?" said Jud.

"I think it was my shot that brought him down; the boys agreed that it was, and I always felt proud of the exploit, for I told you he was one of the worst imps that ever scourged Arizona or New Mexico."

"And he was the father of Cochita?"

"He was the identical individual."

CHAPTER VI

AT DEAD MAN'S CROSSING.

STANDING on the highest ground, Bob Goodale held his field glass to his eyes and carefully scanned the country to west, north, and east. The forking of the Santa Catalina range gave it the form of a horseshoe, with the apex to the north. The branch to the left stopped short at a point northwest of where the spectator stood, but on the right it continued southward, as has already been said, for miles beyond the line of the Southern Pacific Railway.

What first impressed the youth was the abruptness with which the mountains in that part of the world rise from the plain. They seem to have been pushed upward for several thousand feet, instead of gradually sloping away from the summit in every direction. Nowhere did the peaks touch the snow line, but the craggy masses, their cañons crowned with sturdy pines and cedars, took on an ap-

pearance of soft coolness that was specially inviting to those who moved across the burning plains. The distance gave a delicate, exquisite bluish tint that lent charm to the picture.

The glass revealed these pines, and the immense piles of rock, and he identified a portion of one cañon, which opened toward him. While the gorge was several hundred feet in width, the stream which twisted and tumbled through the middle was less than a dozen yards wide. In the distance it looked like foaming snow. He even fancied he could detect the faint roar made by the dashing over the rocks, but must have been mistaken.

By and by he made out a number of black specks that seemed to shift their position now and then. When he asked his uncle for the explanation, he was told:

"They are some of my cattle, browsing."

"How many of them are there?"

"You know I have about three thousand altogether, but they may be scattered over miles of country. Arizona Alf and Long Micah are looking after them."

Bob leveled the glass again.

"I see two or three white spots to the north."

"They are the three adobe structures that make up the town of Corlita, at present occupied by Zeke Connor and his wife."

"I should think he would be in a dangerous situation in case of an outbreak among the Apaches."

"So is every one in this part of the world outside the large towns—he no more than the rest of us and not so much as many on the ranches."

"How is that?"

"Zeke is an old settler and knows redskins. So long as he gets a few minutes' notice of their coming, he is safe. It would take a battery of artillery to batter down those adobe walls and there is no way of burning them. So, how are they going to fetch him?"

"He couldn't have enough food and water to stand a siege."

"When the Apaches start out on their raids they have no time to besiege any place, no matter how much they may want to get at certain persons. They sweep over the country like a cyclone, striking here to-night and swooping down on another place to-morrow

that is seventy-five miles away. Then," added the rancher, "you must remember that the Apaches don't see that old Zeke is worth so much trouble. Within an hour or two after the bucks rush the Reservation, the United States cavalry are after them and if they don't overhaul the raiders mighty soon they keep them on the jump."

"Two years ago," said Jud, who had again yanked a blade of grass loose and was chewing it, "I got to Corlita a little late. My off hoss had gone lame and I had to humor him, but, if I had been fifteen minutes later, it would have been the end of Jud Staples. When I druv up, Zeke told me cool-like that Geronimo was off the Reservation and he was expecting him every minute. A cowboy had rode past on a dead run to warn the ranches he could reach, and he told Zeke that the Apaches were behind him."

"Wal, you see Zeke had an extra force that night, for besides himself and wife there was me, and he always kept enough weapons and ammunition for half a dozen men. I hadn't more'n got my hosses under kiver—I hadn't any passengers—when the Apaches swooped down on us. It was near dark and they kept

circling around the buildings, tryin' to find an opening, but there wasn't a minute when we was in the slightest danger. About midnight they made up their minds that they was wasting time and rode off, but, confound 'em, they managed to shoot both my hosses, which was the very thing I feared."

"Everything was quiet when I left for the East; haven't you heard anything from the Reservation?"

"Zeke told me this morning that he saw Captain Burley a few days ago, and he said all was like a mill pond; Geronimo and the rest of 'em are working as if they had never been anything else but farmers and they love it, but," added Jud, "that's the way it has always been; they may be plotting the biggest raid they ever made, and when they do make a rush they will be gone before the cavalry can stop 'em."

"I wonder, Jud, that you stay in this part of the world, where you are in danger more or less all the time."

The old man chuckled.

"Tenderfoot, will you tell me where in the whole world you can find a spot in which you ain't in danger all the time?"

"I don't think I can, but some places are worse than others, and I should think this is one of the worst of them all."

"Why are you coming into it, tenderfoot?"

Bob laughed.

"Pretty well put, but you say things seem to be quiet just now."

"As I observed a minute ago, that's no sign deviltry ain't afoot; them Apaches don't send a brass band in front to let people know they're comin'."

"My father gave his consent to my making Uncle Hiram a visit on his declaration that he didn't think anything was to be feared, and I believe," said Bob, looking at his relative, "that you are under promise to hurry me home if any outbreak does take place."

"Correct, my boy."

"I should be very sorry if I had to turn around and leave soon after getting here, and I shouldn't go at all, if it wasn't for that promise."

"Wal," replied Jud, removing his hat and thoughtfully scratching his head. "I'm hopeful that Hi is right; he sartin sure has been in this part of the world long enough to know

a good deal about it and the people. I'm always as ready as I can well be, but that Winchester a-layin' under my seat, hasn't been fired for weeks."

The driver was about to go to the stage, where the ponies were standing with drooping heads, when Bob Goodale turned his glass to the northwest, observing which his uncle said:

"You are pointing at the spot where my house stands, but if your glass was as big as a stove pipe, you wouldn't see the building."

"Why not?"

"It stands just beyond that point in the range, which is the end of that spur; you have to pass around it for a little way and there you are."

"I think I see some one in that direction."

"On horseback, I suppose?"

"I believe that's the only way people travel in Arizona after they leave the railroad, but I can hardly make him out."

The men peered in the direction indicated. The air was clear, and all the conditions favorable, but the task was severe for the naked eye.

"Let me take a look, if you please."

Bob slipped the strap over his head and passed the instrument to his uncle, who carefully studied the figure that had caught the attention of the youth. A minute or two later he lowered the glass.

"You are right; it is a horseman who is headed this way, but his animal seems to be walking, as if the man isn't satisfied with the looks of things. Jud, suppose you see what you can make out."

The old man had hardly leveled the instrument when he said:

"It's an Injun, and there's only one of 'em we can see, which ain't sayin' there ain't a dozen more within call."

"They can't be very near him without our being able to see them, through the glass; what reason could they have for keeping themselves out of sight while at that distance?"

"Hi, I'll have to refer you to themselves," replied Jud, handing the glass to Bob, who once more gave himself to the study of the dusky stranger that had acquired so much interest to the three.

"He is coming on—now his pony breaks into a gallop; at that rate he will soon be here."

A few minutes later Bob added :

"He has dropped into a walk and seems to be moving slowly."

"He isn't moving at all," was the surprising remark of his uncle, who, shading his eyes with one hand, gazed intently at the dusky horseman. The exclamation he had just uttered showed the remarkable keenness of his vision. But Jud Staples did almost equally well, for he immediately confirmed the rancher's words.

Bob Goodale, however, kept the glass leveled.

"He starts forward again; now his pony breaks into a gallop; it looks as if he has thrown all doubts aside."

So it would seem, for the rapid pace of the animal continued, and he did not swerve to the right or left, until he drew up within twenty paces, and the rider waved a hand in a military salute and called out in the best of English :

"How do you do, friends?"

"Never better," replied the rancher; "how is it with yourself?"

"The same—many thanks."

"Have you lately come from the Reservation?"

"I left yesterday with permission of the agent; I am under promise to be back to-morrow."

The Indian wore the usual attire of his people; that is to say his hair, which was only moderately long, had no covering, though a couple of stained eagle feathers protruded from the crown. Leggings, moccasins, and bare chest and arms were there. He was a fine specimen of physical manhood as he sat erect on the wiry pony without saddle and only a single turn of rope to serve as a bridle. His face was swarthy, like all his people's, but the features were attractive. While he was holding his brief talk, Bob studied him closely, and fancied he had seen him somewhere before, but of course that was a mistake.

"Is everything well on the Reservation?" asked the rancher.

"It couldn't be better; there's not going to be the slightest trouble. Well, good-by."

With that the Indian wheeled his pony and galloped back toward the point whence he came.

"I suppose you know him?" remarked the elder Goodale.

"No; how could I know who he is when I never saw or heard of him?"

"He is Cochita."

CHAPTER VII

OVER THE TRAIL

BOB GOODALE was amazed to learn that the handsome Indian youth who had exchanged the few words with them was Cochita son of the once dreaded Chief Dracus, the youth who, after being trained and educated in one of the best schools in the East, had returned to his own people, the Warm Spring Apaches, with the purpose, as he had declared, of doing all he could to civilize and Christianize them. He had taken up his residence on the San Carlos Reservation and had been there several months. His influence thus far had been worthy of his professions and many held high hope of the vast good he would accomplish among his wild people. It was his photograph which had partly recalled Cochita to Bob.

There were others, however, as I have shown, who distrusted the young Apache.

Not denying the wonderful transforming power of Christianity, they believed that the inheritor of the frightful disposition shown by his parent, and the burning memory of the wrongs suffered by his race, would transform the son into the same demon that the chief had proved himself to be. The near future must answer the momentous question.

The rickety stage resumed its plodding journey northward, and before the set of sun drew up at the little adobe building, where Zeke Connor and his wife kept ward and watch in the very center of the region which was open to the forays of the Apaches, whenever they broke away from the Reservation and started on their career of destruction and death.

Zeke Connor looked enough like Jud Staples to be his twin brother. He came grimly forward to greet the new arrivals, and help unharness the horses and put them away in his stable, for their return on the morrow to Raymond, the station on the railway to the south. He was smoking a short clay pipe, was slow in his movements, but he had proved he could become a cyclone of activity and

prowess in a desperate emergency. He was glum, reserved, and moody. He shook hands with the rancher, nodded silently to Bob when introduced, and then asked the two to eat supper with him. Goodale replied, with thanks, that he expected to reach home in time for the evening meal. He returned the salutation of the short heavy woman, the wife of Zeke, who appeared at the open door, but no words passed between them. Then the trunks were carried into the living room, there to await the wagon that was to be sent on the morrow to carry them to the ranch.

Zeke's next act was to lead out the ponies which had been brought to his place several days before for the use to which they were now put. They had been bridled and the saddles were placed upon their backs and cinched in place. These saddles were ornate and costly, the easiest in the world in which to ride, with their deep curvature and box stirrups.

"Pedro is yours," said the uncle to his nephew, who, as may be supposed, studied his animal with keen interest. He was rather smaller than his companion, of a bay color, with a starred forehead and white

fetlocks. Clean-limbed, high-spirited, of graceful form, he was capable of great speed and endurance. Bob was certain that if the pony had been one among a thousand from which to select, he would have taken him at once.

Having had little or no exercise for several days, both horses were eager and overrunning with life. They longed to stretch their limbs, as a man who has been cramped for hours yearns to shake the sluggishness out of his arms and legs.

"Bob, do you think you can manage him?" asked his relative, with distrust in his voice; "he is a mettled creature and disposed to play tricks with you; you'll have to look out."

"He suits me down to the ground," replied the youth, with sparkling eyes; "if he can fling me out of the saddle, he is welcome to do it; does he buck?"

"No; he has never done that, but there's no telling what whims may enter his head when he feels you in the saddle."

Pedro at first showed a strong dislike of being mounted by any one. When Bob stepped forward to put his foot in the stirrup, he danced away and pulled at the bit which

the youth had grasped. Bob drew him back, but spoke soothingly and tried to win the good will of the beautiful creature. But that could not be done in a few minutes. Finally, the rancher grasped the bit with a firm hand and held the brute almost motionless. Bob slipped his left foot into the stirrup, and in a twinkling swung himself over the pony's back and dropped into his seat. Seizing the bridle reins with a strong hand, he said:

"Let go, uncle."

The man did so with some misgivings. The three men watched proceedings, and even Mrs. Connor looked out from the door of her house.

The rancher had strapped on his own spurs while in the stage, and helped Bob to fasten a pair upon his boots, so the latter was not handicapped, having no rifle or bundle to manage, and with his revolver reposing in the holster at his side.

The moment Bob felt settled in his seat, he pricked the ribs of Pedro sharply. With a snort the pony seemed to leap a dozen feet. Bob pricked him again, and the animal burst across the plain and through the sagebrush as if shot from a catapult. The rider gave

him a loose rein, but as he passed out on the plain, gradually drew his head around, describing a large circle, and galloped back to where the two men were standing, and his uncle sat waiting in his own saddle.

On the way the pony made several attempts to unseat his rider. He leaped sharply to the right or left, dashed impetuously forward, halted abruptly, and once stood almost upright on his hind feet and pawed the air. Bob was on the alert, and once he came within a hair of pitching out of the saddle, but he was the victor in the end, and rounded to in front of the admiring group.

"I'm thinkin' it ain't just the thing to call you a tenderfoot," was the highest compliment Jud Staples could pay the youth. The rancher was all smiles.

"I'm proud of my nephew."

Zeke Connor slowly took his pipe from between his lips, squinted one eye, and uttered the simple expression:

"You'll do, younker!"

Waving the little party good-by, Goodale and the youth turned the heads of their horses toward the northwest and dashed off at a brisk gallop. The animals needed no

urging, but had to be held in for the first two or three miles. Since they knew the way, the two rode side by side, leaving the ponies to themselves. Bunch grass and sagebrush were on every hand, with patches of sand into which the hoofs of the animals sank softly for several inches, but without any apparent discomfort to them.

The course led them around the southern end of the western spur of the Santa Catalina range. The mountains, as I have said, were noticeable for the abruptness with which they rose from the plain. It was as if a couple of horsemen in journeying over the level country had to pass around an immense castle that stood in their path.

Pedro, the pony of Bob, was on the right, and in his impatience had forged a little ahead of Jack, the animal which the rancher bestrode. The former kept a smooth, even pace that was delightful to Bob, who, however, was on his guard against any sudden trick of the animal, who was not likely to yield without a struggle to his new master.

Suddenly Pedro pricked his ears and shied so sharply to the left that he placed himself in front of the other pony. If the effort was

to unhorse his rider, it was not sufficient to endanger him. Pedro continued snorting, shied farther and almost checked his progress.

"What is he trying to do?" asked the puzzled youth.

"He is scared; don't you see he has good cause to be?"

For the first time, Bob looked at the ground on his right. At the base of a bush of sagebrush, he saw an enormous rattlesnake, lying in coil, with his triangular head raised, and the tail pointing upward, vibrating so fast that the end looked misty and nearly invisible. But for the watchfulness of Pedro, he would have stepped upon the horrible reptile, which Bob regarded with the intense disgust that seems natural to all men. The head swung slowly back and forth, like a pendulum, and the distended jaws displayed their prong-like fangs, with the sacs at their roots bursting with venom.

"Ugh!" exclaimed Bob; "did you ever see anything so hideous?"

"You'll get used to them in this part of the world; we don't mind them; let's go on."

"Not yet; wait a minute."

After some effort Bob quieted his pony,

though, like all animals, he was terrified at sight of the reptile, whose deadly power he instinctively knew.

"Pedro isn't gun shy?"

"Not at all."

"As the hunters say, that rattler is my meat."

"It takes good shooting."

Bob had drawn his revolver from his holster, and carefully sighted at the ugly, vibrating head. When the sharp crack rang out, Pedro did not move a hoof, though he was trembling in every limb. The serpent broke into furious writhings, but the head which a moment before crowned the horrible circle was gone, shattered into nothingness by the well-aimed bullet of Bob Goodale.

"I couldn't have done better myself," said the admiring rancher; "the aforesaid rattler, considered strictly as a rattler, can't be said to be of much account; with your permission, we will now resume our journey homeward."

"That's the one feature of your country, uncle, to which I can never become accustomed; I have always abominated the sight of a snake, even when harmless."

"The seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent's head," repeated the elder; "we have a saying in this part of the world that if you don't trouble trouble, then trouble won't trouble you. I have shot scores of rattlers, till I grew tired. We raise such big crops of them in Arizona and New Mexico, that all we can blot out can't make a perceptible difference with the total; so one may as well not waste his ammunition."

"It will take a good deal of argument to make me feel I am throwing away a shot when I blow the head off of one of those things."

"You saw how quickly Pedro side-stepped; you have only to keep beyond reach of a rattler, and, no matter how big and fierce he may be, he will let you alone."

CHAPTER VIII

ON THE RANCH

THE ranch home of Hiram Goodale was a low, one-story structure, of adobe or sun-dried bricks, built in the form of a square, with a patio or court in the middle. Each side of this open space was bounded by two rooms, with a door opening outward and another inward upon the patio. Thus all the rooms were independent of one another. One was given over to cooking, while most of the remaining were sleeping and living apartments. The roof was of dirt laid thickly upon broad planks.

The peculiar clay from which adobe is made was abundant on the banks of one of the small streams that issued from the Santa Catalina range, and the work of construction was less than one would suppose. The stream, after leaving the mountains, broadened out to a width of nearly a hundred feet. As is generally the case, there was a vigorous

growth of live oak along the water, and the house had been erected so near that it had the benefit of this grateful shade during the flaming summer which reigns in Arizona.

It was in front of such a building that Hiram Goodale and his nephew Bob drew rein just as night was closing in. It was a ten-mile ride from Corlita that was unmarked by any incident except that which has been related. The cattle roaming through the foothills, along the streams and over the plain required no special attention, so that the two men who were hired to attend to this work drove to the house at sunset, dismounted and turned their ponies loose. The building contained two rooms which could be used as stables in an emergency, such as an attack by Indians, but nothing of the kind had occurred for months. Consequently the rancher found all his family at home, and on the point of sitting down to the evening meal in the dining-room.

Aunt Minnie was a large, wholesome woman, of cheery disposition, and devoted to her husband, as a wife must have been to spend the weeks and months and years in such a lonely region, where all was the same monotonous grind of hard work, with an

element of peril ever present. But the couple forever talked of the time when they could afford to abandon the life and settle elsewhere for the rest of their days in comfort and amid the luxuries of civilization. They talked and set the day and postponed it, with the result that it was still in the misty future, with the prospect of the change growing less each year.

Aunt Minnie had visited her brother-in-law five years before, when Bob was a little fellow. She could hardly believe her eyes, when she flung her arms about his neck and affectionately welcomed him to her home.

"Who would have believed it?" she laughed, as she held him off and looked admiringly into the handsome blushing face. "You remind me of that fine lad who stayed over night with us last summer. He was with General Crook and I think the two are relatives. Why you are almost as tall as Hiram and twice as good looking as he ever was."

"There, there, Minnie, that will do," broke in her husband; "you know Silas and I are alike as two peas, and Bob looks like his father; the conclusion can't be escaped."

"To those who believe as you do; but even if you are homely, Hiram, you're the best husband that ever lived."

"And the hungriest one; you ought to have heard that nephew of yours go on, when we were coming over the trail; he said that any wife who would keep her husband waiting for his supper—well, his words were too scandalous for me to repeat."

The rancher pinched the chubby cheek of the happy woman, and with his arm around her waist conducted her into the dining-room, where the meal was awaiting them. The owner of several thousand head of cattle has no excuse for lacking the choicest morsels that the animals can provide. It may be said that Corlita was the distributing point for other supplies and the mail for the ranch. Jud Staples brought them to the hamlet from the railway station, and they were held for Goodale until he sent for them.

You have already heard the names of the two cow-men in the employ of Goodale. Arizona Alf Gerhard was nearly forty years old and had spent his life on the plains, having been born in Kansas. He was a husky, iron-limbed fellow, with angular

features and smooth-shaven face. But as a cow puncher none was his superior. He had twice won the championship of Pima County for quickness in lassoing and throwing a steer, and a bucking bronco was the creature he loved to bestride and battle with—the uglier the animal the better he liked it. He had never failed to conquer the most vicious bronco that ever bucked the life out of other ambitious horsemen.

Long Micah Polk was hardly inferior to Alf. He was a few years younger, a native of Missouri, very tall, slightly bent at the shoulders, with long, tawny mustache and goatee, but swift of foot, unerring with the rifle or revolver, inclined to be reserved, kind of heart and ready to risk his life for any one who had the slightest claim upon him. When Hiram Goodale left for the East, he knew he could not place his wife in safer hands than were these loyal, honest fellows, who would shrink from no danger or suffering to keep all harm from her. They were hardly less devoted to him, so that, since we find them together again, we may think and speak of them as a happy family in every sense of the word.

Days of the rarest enjoyment to Bob Goodale followed. Although the intolerable summer was near at hand, the heat made itself felt only during the middle of the day. The mornings and evenings were cool and sleep was refreshing. The water that dashed from among the mountains was cold and clear; food was abundant, and the air tingled with ozone. The rainy season would not open for a couple of months.

A strong attachment speedily sprang up between Bob and his pony. Pedro was an admirable animal, and, like all such, he respected, so to speak, the youth who had proved his right to mastery.

The lad rode into the hills and over the plains, sometimes alone, and often in the company of Arizona Alf, or Long Micah, or his uncle. The duties of the cowmen kept them apart throughout the day. To make sure the cattle were not wandering too far afield, they had to traverse many miles, and were often far beyond sight or hail of one another. If all went well, the four—for Hiram Goodale never shirked his own duties—met at nightfall, the three to smoke far into the night, while Bob listened with

rapt interest to the exchange of reminiscences.

Like all tenderfeet, the youth had to face one or two rough experiences before he was accepted at his real worth. When invited by Alf and Micah to mount a bucking bronco, he did so without hesitation. Hardly had he seated himself in the saddle when he landed on his head. Fortunately the ground was soft and yielding. The next minute he had scrambled to his feet amid the laughter of the spectators, among whom was his uncle, and he was in the saddle again. Although the pony made persistent attempts to repeat his previous performance, Bob held fast and received the compliments he had fairly won.

His skill with his revolver was pronounced remarkable in one of his years, though he had much to learn in handling the weapon, so as to fire in the quickest time possible without affecting his aim. The men taught him the trick, which required only practice to make perfect. He showed ability with the Winchester which his uncle presented to him, but could not expect to equal any one of the three men. It was agreed that two or three years on the ranch would enable Bob to com-



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mand full wages, for in that time he would become master of branding, cutting out, lassoing, and all that is necessary to know about the rearing and care of cattle.

But our young friend had not gone to the Southwest to become a cowboy. He had only a few weeks at command, and he knew they would pass all too quickly, but when he returned home, it would be to stay there for the rest of his life.

Bob's great surprise came before the close of the first week. One night, after the evening meal, while Alf and Micah were seated under the live oaks smoking, the Goodales gathered in the cool of the patio for a few minutes' chat.

"To-morrow your Aunt Minnie starts for the East on a visit to your father and sister," said the rancher.

Bob expressed his astonishment.

"It is sooner than she intended, but there are several reasons why we have agreed it is best for her not to wait. She will have time to remain awhile at your home and to bring Minnie back for a visit before the trying summer is fully upon us."

"But aunty's visit to father and Minnie will be very short."

"I am thinking of making it several weeks," explained the woman. Hiram reached over and pinched her cheek in a way that was a habit with him. He chuckled.

"She thinks so, but she won't be there three days before she will be homesick and fretting to rejoin her noble husband."

"Just wait and see," protested the wife with a pout.

"That's what I'm going to do, and I sha'n't have to wait long; I'll ride to Corlita tomorrow morning in time for Jud to take her and her baggage to Raymond. She will need about a week to reach your home; a week from that time Jud will bring a letter for me, in which Minnie will tell me the day on which to expect her. You see, Bob, I'm hurrying her off, for the sooner she goes, the sooner she will be back; there's logic for you."

The plan was carried out. In the radiant softness of the Arizona morning, Hiram Goodale rode in his little carryall to Corlita, with his wife and trunk, and within the following half hour she disappeared down the stage road leading to the station where she was to board the train eastward. The rancher rode homeward at a thoughtful pace.

"I wonder if it was queer that in talking over this visit of Minnie and laying our plans, neither she nor I said a word about the Apaches; I had Alf ride northward yesterday until he was nigh enough to San Carlos to gather the news, if there was any news to gather. He met an old friend that had been on the Reservation the day before, who told him everything was quiet, with not a sign of an outbreak. Can it be that Geronimo has turned good Indian and Cochita is going to play the part of an evangelist among his people? Some believe so; I wish I could, but I can't."

CHAPTER IX

STARTLING NEWS

HIRAM GOODALE smiled when he read the first letter written by his wife after her arrival at the home of his brother in Central Pennsylvania. Everything had gone well and the meeting with her relatives was delightful, but she had decided to return at the end of a few days. She gave several ingenious reasons for this decision, the most important of which was that the near approach of the hot summer made it advisable that the visit of their niece to the ranch should not be deferred.

Father and daughter missed Bob more than they had anticipated, and his return would be hastened by hastening the westward journey of Minnie. The wife promised to name the date of her departure in the next letter.

"The best woman that ever lived," said the husband to Bob after reading the letter; "but

she doesn't name the real reason of her coming back so soon."

"What is it?" asked the youth, who was standing outside the ranch house in front of his uncle, as he read.

"Homesickness; you and your folks can't understand how we are able to content ourselves in this lonely region, where there are no churches, no schools, no society, and it is hard to tell Sunday from the other days in the week, but the explanation is in the word home."

And the rancher hummed:

"'Be it ever so humble, there's no place like home.'"

It had become the daily habit of Bob to ride to Corlita each afternoon for letters from the East. His sister wrote every day and his father every few days. Rarely was a telegram sent, for little could be gained thereby, since the message was necessarily held at the railway station until Jud Staples could bring it to Corlita, with the shriveled mail bag. The stage which brought the letter referred to brought one from the sister and father of Bob, who read them to his uncle.

"Father says what aunty does not say.

She is clearly homesick and yearns so much to get home, that he has given up trying to dissuade her. She and sister are packing up, and the mail to-morrow will let us know when to meet them. They will come straight through, so they can make a pretty close calculation."

"What does your father say about Minnie's visit?"

"He doesn't give room for any doubt on that," replied Bob with a laugh, as he took the missive from his pocket and read the paragraph:

"'One week after Minnie's arrival, you and she will start home; you may set out sooner if so inclined, but not a day later. She will get enough of Arizóna in a week; I suppose you would be glad to stay longer, but you will have had several weeks at the time of leaving, and that ought to be enough for a lifetime. It would be in *my* case.'"

A few days later, after the noon meal, which was eaten by uncle and nephew alone, Alf and Micah being miles away looking after the cattle, Bob swung into the saddle of Pedro and struck off at an easy pace toward Corlita, ten miles distant. He carried his Winchester

across the front of his saddle and had proposed to take a couple of saddle horses with him, thinking it likely that his aunt and sister would come in the stage, but his uncle thought otherwise, and the youth rode away alone.

Before he drew up at the scattered adobe buildings, something told him that startling news awaited him. Mrs. Connor was not visible, being busy within her home, but Zeke was standing in front, looking intently at the young horseman and savagely smoking his pipe. It was his attitude and the vigorous puffs which piled above his sombrero that alarmed Bob, who touched spur to Pedro and sharply reined up within a few paces of the old man.

"What's the news, Zeke?"

"You don't purtend you haven't heerd, tenderfoot?"

"Not a word."

"Why, them Apaches have rushed the Reservation and are off on one of their raids; I'm expecting to see 'em any minute."

Bob swallowed the lump that rose in his throat and his face paled, but he held himself in hand.

"When did they make the break?"

"Night afore last."

"How did you hear of it?"

"Jim Leedon from Bowman's ranch rode through here lickety-split this forenoon, halting just long enough to let me know, when he was off again to warn such ranches as he could reach ahead of the varmints."

"Why didn't he stop at our place?"

"You're off his course, but I reckon he'd have gone there if he hadn't knowed you was in good shape for a visit. Hiram can't save his cattle if the imps take a notion to kill or run off a few, but they ain't looking for cattle; it's humans."

"Did you learn how many Apaches have broken away?"

"There's no sartinty, but Jim was sure there was twenty at least."

"With Geronimo at their head, of course?"

"He's always at the head, but this time another leader is with him—the son of that old Dracus your uncle helped to hit the long trail some years ago."

"You don't mean Cochita?"

Zeke nodded his head.

"That's the chap, and I don't reckon Geronimo can teach him anything, even if he

has been wasting so much time in your Eastern schools."

"Where's Jud Staples?" was the unnecessary question of Bob.

"He left for Raymond at the usual time this morning."

"Without knowing of the break at San Carlos?"

"Of course; how could he know anything?"

"He will learn of it at Raymond and will stay there."

"That's onsartin; I *hope so*."

"God grant it!" was the fervent exclamation of the youth.

"Why are you so scared?" asked the old man; "you have one of the best horses in the country and can take care of yourself."

"It isn't that, but my aunt and sister are coming from the East and are about due at Raymond; I am afraid they left with Jud this afternoon."

Zeke Connor screwed up his lips and whistled softly.

"Whew! that's bad; if Jim Leedon had arriv' a little sooner, Jud would have stayed here and then your folks couldn't have come if they wanted to."

Bob caught at each shadowy hope.

"Leedon will keep on to Raymond and warn the agent there, so it will be as well."

"I don't want to distress you, tenderfoot, but he ain't likely to do that; there's only one man there, while there are women and children at lots of ranches that he will do all he can to warn; wife and I can take care of ourselves, but some of them can't."

"If Jud has had no trouble, he ought to be here in half an hour."

"Yes, but he is sometimes late."

Bob could not wait. He turned the nose of Pedro toward the railway and pricked him with his spur.

"I shall keep on to Raymond, if I don't meet Jud before."

And with these words, he sped southward with arrowy swiftness.

"Now, Pedro, do your best," he said to his peerless animal, whose graceful limbs doubled under his body, as if the intelligent animal understood what was expected of him. The youth settled himself in the saddle and peered ahead over the sagebrush, as they skurried under the small hoofs. If Jud was on time, and no harm had befallen him, he ought to

come in sight almost at any moment. As Pedro bounded forward with his long, even strides, Bob raised his field glass and swept the horizon, thus brought into view for several miles. He hardly glanced anywhere except over the road in front, but caught no sight of stage, animal, or man.

Young Goodale felt nothing in the nature of personal fear. He knew he was liable at any moment to be discovered by parties of marauding Apaches, but none of them could overtake Pedro, and he scorned the thought of running into ambush.

His brain was more active than ever before. There were moments of reaction, when he almost persuaded himself that he had no cause for fear. Surely his aunt and sister would tarry long enough to send word to the ranch; even if they reached the railway station, the news of the Apache raid must be awaiting them, and they would not venture into the dangerous region. Jud Staples was too prudent to run a risk whose nature none knew better, and the fact that he was already late in coming into Bob's field of vision indicated that he had been prudent. The youth would ride straight to Raymond, where he would

find his relatives waiting, if they had come that far, which was doubtful.

These thoughts were comforting, but they could not last. Cold logic made it probable that Aunt Minnie and his sister had followed their letters so closely that they had reached Raymond early that afternoon. There was no means of telegraphing from the section north to the railway, and the messenger speeding on his errand of mercy had ridden at headlong speed to the scattered outlying ranches. Jud Staples would set out at the usual time for Corlita, and the chances were a hundred to one that two of his passengers were the aunt and sister of Bob Goodale.

As the miles sped under the hoofs of the flying pony, the rider's thoughts centered upon Dead Man's Crossing. If anything had happened it was *there*. When Bob, with the aid of the swaying glass, located the little, valley-like depression, his heart almost ceased its throbbing.

"If I do not find them there, I shall have ground for hope."

And yet each mile of the road must have been dangerous to the last degree to the plodding stage. As Bob approached the Crossing,

he drew the pony to a standstill and scanned every point of the compass. Far to the westward he made out a number of flickering specks that were undoubtedly horsemen.

"Some of the Apaches," he muttered, "but as yet they are of no interest to me."

Away once more on the wings of the wind, and the next halt was on the slight rise of ground which allowed him to look down in the hollow at the little twisting stream of sluggish water. As he did so, he stopped breathing and gasped:

"The Apaches caught the stage and passengers here!"

CHAPTER X

THE PARTY OF PURSUIT

THE first object on which the eye of Bob Goodale rested was the stage, wrecked and splintered, the wheels removed and the body lying on its side, so battered and splintered that it was hardly recognizable. The mail bag had been slit and most of the few letters were scattered over a space of several square yards. The traces were cut and the two horses gone.

The next horrifying sight was that of Jud Staples himself. The old man lay flat on the ground, with his face staring upward at the brassy sky. Jud had crossed the Great Divide, and made his last journey with the old stage.

Bob dropped from the saddle, and reverently went forward for a closer inspection. Depressed as he was by the sight, he breathed a prayer of thankfulness that he saw no signs of either of his relatives having been in the

stage that afternoon. No baggage was visible, nor were any tell-tale footprints found. He walked to where the torn letters lay on the sand. With a strange thrill, he observed an envelope twisted across the middle, which showed a part of his own name. Even before he picked it up he recognized the handwriting of his sister. The other portion of the letter lay near, and he had little trouble in adjusting the parts and reading the message.

The sentences were few, the last being:

“Aunt and I have figured it out, and find that if all goes well, we shall arrive at the station named Raymond early on Wednesday afternoon. As you know, we ride some twenty miles by stage to Corlita, where you will meet us, the rest of the way being on horseback, while our trunks are to be taken in a wagon. I am so eager to see you, Bob! But I’m afraid we shall keep pace with this letter, which won’t be of any use therefore at all.”

Strange emotions stirred the heart of the youth.

“She fixed the day of her arrival as Wednesday; that is to-day. They must have been delayed somewhere on the road; how thankful I am!”

Pedro, standing on the higher ground, uttered a faint whinny. Glancing up, Bob saw the pony's head was turned to the northwest, where he must have discovered something unusual. Bob dashed up the slope, Winchester in hand, fearing that a party of Apaches were stealing down upon him. Like a flash he was in the saddle and ready for flight.

There was no need of using his glass, for not more than two hundred yards away, three horsemen were approaching at a swinging gallop, and coming directly for the Crossing.

They were Hiram Goodale, Arizona Alf, and Long Micah. The first raised his hand in salutation as the trio dashed forward and halted.

"You know about the raid, uncle?"

"Yes; not long after you left, Jim Leedon galloped past the grazing ground of a part of our herd in the foothills. Jim had made a circuit down country and was going farther, when he concluded he ought to put us on our guard. He told Alf of the break that had been made from San Carlos and Alf signaled to Micah. The two lost no time in riding to the ranch and telling me, and we were

equally prompt in hurrying off to meet the stage."

"You didn't go to Corlita?"

"We made a short cut across the country, aiming for Dead Man's Crossing, where I felt pretty sure the hold-up would take place if it took place at all. It looks as if we made no mistake," added the rancher, surveying the impressive picture at their feet. "It was what poor Jud has been expecting for a long time, but it is none the less sad on that account."

"I was so fearful that aunty and Minnie would be in the stage that I rode headlong to this place."

"I had the same dread."

"How thankful we are that something kept them back."

"But I'm not sure that it did."

The bronzed face of the rancher was drawn, and there was a gleam of the gray eyes, which showed the stress of the emotion he was holding in check.

"What do you mean by that?" asked the startled Bob.

"We must examine closer before we feel certain."

Even while this brief conversation was going on, Alf and Micah had dismounted, and were walking slowly side by side up the bank of the sluggish stream. Keeping their saddles, uncle and nephew silently watched them.

The two had gone about a hundred yards, when they were seen to stop, as if they had discovered something interesting. They were motionless a moment, when Alf turned his head and beckoned the others to approach. Without leaving their ponies to stand by themselves, man and boy spurred to the side of the cowmen.

They had not reached them, when the horsemen were affrighted by sight of that which held the others speechless. Lying in the bunch grass at the side of the stream, were two empty trunks that had been smashed in. Most of the contents, consisting mainly of ladies' wearing apparel and other articles, had been taken away, but an abundance lay scattered around—certainly more than enough to identify the sex of the owners.

Man and youth had braced themselves for something like this. Their feelings had been keyed for a long time to the highest point, and they were prepared for the truth that

was confirmed before they joined their friends.

"Aunt and sister were passengers in the stage after all."

Bob spoke in a husky undertone, and the voice of the rancher sounded the same:

"There isn't an earthly doubt of it; they were with Jud when the stage was attacked and he was killed."

"But *they* were not killed," said Bob, casting a sweeping glance up and down the stream and over the visible part of the plain; "we should be thankful for that."

"Bob," replied the other impressively; "it is always the other way when Apaches are concerned; I should say the same in this case, except for one thing."

"What's that?"

"Cochita."

"You have always spoken of him as worse than Geronimo."

"So he is, if such a thing be possible, but the situation has become very peculiar. From what I was told when at your house a few weeks ago, that dusky imp showed a fondness for Minnie."

"I don't think there's any doubt of it."

"Well, when he meets her in this part of the world, he will probably be as fond of her as ever, and may act in his way the part of a friend."

"You speak, uncle, as if it was he who led this attack."

"It's guesswork of course, but he is one of the leaders of this raid, and if he was not here at the time, he is sure to learn of it very soon, and of the capture of a young and a middle-aged woman."

"It is a view of the situation that never occurred to me; I don't know what to answer or what to ask you to do. I can't remain idle while Minnie is in any peril from these unspeakable Apaches."

"And how do you think it is with *me*, when my wife is in their power? One thing angers me beyond bearing."

"What is that?"

"Wife is as good a pistol shot as you; it has been her practice for years never to ride a mile from the house without carrying a loaded revolver; all the charges except the last were for Apaches; the last was for herself. Her revolver is in the house, and she is without one when she needs it more than ever before."

"Sister has a fine weapon, and I am sure she brought it with her."

"It isn't likely that it will be of any earthly benefit to her."

"She will give her life, if necessary, to save aunty."

"I do not doubt that, and yet the giving of her life may not help wife in the least. Strange as it sounds, the only hope that I can see is in the help of one of the worst miscreants that ever lived; I mean Cochita."

"And his friendship to Minnie must include her friends."

"Therein lies hope for wife, and I must confess it is slight."

Even with the singular ground upon which to base the slender hope to which he referred, the man foresaw complications of which the boy did not dream.

"Then, from what you say," added Bob, "we may as well go back to the ranch and wait till Cochita informs us as to his wishes."

"By no means. Despite my words, another possibility presents itself. I believe the break from the Reservation is far more serious than Jim Leedon thinks. Geronimo generally takes his squaws and children with him. In

that case, there are more than a hundred Apaches, rushing from San Carlos and the United States cavalry, and probably heading for old Mexico. They won't throw away any time, but to-night ought to find them in the Santa Catalina range, to the eastward of us. I believe Cochita and Geronimo are there now, and will stay until well toward morning. There is a good deal of jealousy between the old chief and this sprig who has been educated in the East— Hello! what have you learned?" abruptly called Goodale to his men, who had been carefully studying the ground, while the uncle and nephew were talking. Alf was on one side of the small stream and Micah on the opposite. The rancher watched their actions, and noted a movement of Arizona Alf which made him call to him.

The cowboy came toward his employer, with Micah close after him.

"This hold-up was made by three Apaches that were afoot and hidden in the sand in their usual style. They shot old Jud when he came up, cut loose the horses and started back for the mountains, two riding one critter and one t'other."

"Which way did they go?"

"Their trail leads eastward, though they may have turned off between here and the foothills; if they didn't, they're only a few miles away."

"And the women?" asked Hiram, knowing what the answer would be.

"They went with them, both walking."

"We take the trail, and, if anything can be done," added the rancher, compressing his lips, "we shall do it; lead on, Alf!"

CHAPTER XI

AT THE MOUNTAIN BASE

IT will be remembered that the eastern spur of the Santa Catalina range pushes its way southward for a considerable distance below the line of the Southern Pacific Railway. It is marked by depressions and elevations of varying heights, broken in many places by cañon-like passages, and displays the peculiarity I have named,—that of shooting abruptly upward from the plain into the clear sky.

It followed, therefore, that when the four horsemen rode eastward, they faced the spur, which was five or six miles from Dead Man's Crossing. Arizona Alf, because of his age and greater experience, acted as guide, though neither Micah nor the rancher himself was much his inferior in knowledge of the ways of the red men. Alf took the lead, with Micah directly behind, while uncle and nephew, for most of the distance, kept side by side.

Although Bob Goodale was now entering upon a phase of ranch life with which he had not the slightest acquaintance, several facts were clear to him. It was almost certain that the captors of Minnie and her aunt had made for the nearest point of the Santa Catalina range, and, since they could not have had much of a start of their pursuers, they did not reach the base of the spur long before the latter started. Bob pointed his field glass toward the point, hoping to gain sight of them, but was disappointed.

A more disturbing certainty was that no such pursuit could be pressed without the knowledge of those who were pursued. Geronimo and Cochita knew that the government cavalry would soon be on their heels, and it would take the most vigorous hustling to keep clear of the armed horsemen, who were certain to be in an ugly mood. Consequently, the dusky lookouts were alert and sure to discover the approach of the small party of ranchers.

Such being the case, what possible hope was there for the latter? It lay, as Hiram Goodale said, in the good-will of Cochita for the more youthful of the captives.

Bob's heart ached when he looked down

at the sandy soil and saw beside the tracks of the two horses, the dainty footprints of his sister, and the more substantial ones of his aunt. It must have been trying to them, and there was no saying what abuse had been heaped upon the two, as they meekly obeyed the commands of their savage captors. How he longed to be able to strike a blow in behalf of his loved ones, and how eagerly he would rush to their help, if only the chance were given him!

The ride continued for more than half the distance without a word being spoken by either of the cowboys. Bob, who often glanced at Alf, saw him look at the ground now and then, and fix his eyes as often upon the mountains they were approaching. No one could have understood the situation better than he.

Suddenly, when everything was going with monotonous smoothness and nothing but the soft crunching of the hoofs of the ponies was heard, the animal ridden by Alf uttered a snort, and made a sudden leap to the left. Skilful a horseman as was the cowman, he came within a hair of being unseated, because of the unexpectedness of the action. The

man uttered an angry exclamation, quickly recovered himself, and brought the bronco to his haunches.

"Look!" called Bob in a startled voice to his uncle, who, like the others, had seen the cause of the animal's fright. An Apache warrior lay on his side in the sand close to a bit of sagebrush, as dead as could be. All four forced their animals to draw near the body, though it was against their will. The men leaned over and scrutinized the lifeless form. A wound in the forehead, so tiny as not to be perceptible at first sight, left no doubt as to the cause of the buck's death.

"It was a pistol shot that laid *him* out," was the comment of Arizona Alf, as he straightened up and looked into the faces of his companions, as if referring to some incident of insignificant interest.

The eyes of uncle and nephew met.

"I told you Minnie was a good shot."

The rancher nodded.

"She certainly knew how to aim her revolver *that* time."

"But while she was about it, why didn't she shoot the other two?" impatiently demanded Bob.

"Probably she didn't get the chance; pity it was so."

It was noticeable that the weapons of the dead Apache had been taken by his surviving acquaintances, who must have been of an economical turn of mind. There could be no mistake about the victim being from the Reservation, for his "tag" was still on him. He was liable to be shot in the circumstances, but it is hardly likely that Geronimo or Cochita ever supposed he would be brought down by a white girl.

Our friends did not pause by the body. The afternoon was wearing to a close and they hoped to accomplish or learn something before night, when the partial moon might help, or what was as likely, hinder their plans. Hitherto they had ridden at an easy canter for most of the way, but they now dropped to a walk, which was kept up until they were quite near the craggy base of the mountain range.

At this point the four horsemen drew together and halted. The time had come for an understanding of the situation and plans, which, as I have shown, were taking a most peculiar turn.

The inference was warranted that if Cochita,

merciless though he was in his hatred of the Caucasian race, knew of the misfortune of his old friend, he would do his utmost to ward off harm from her as well as from her aunt. The point, therefore, was to make sure that he should learn of her captivity and peril before it was too late. Could our friends have been assured that the young Apache leader already possessed that knowledge their wisest course would have been to withdraw or at most to maintain a neutral attitude, for surely they could do nothing to help the women, and were sure to complicate matters by their efforts.

But the factor of doubt made all the trouble. Primarily the notorious Geronimo was the leader in the formidable outbreak, but Cochita was a second, if not his equal in more than one respect. The aim of the pursuers was to make the dusky youth acquainted with the truth at the earliest possible moment. It might be that Geronimo was in the mountains with the main party. Indeed, the probabilities pointed that way. Cochita, young, aggressive, restless, and eager to strike all the blows he could, was probably at some distance on a raid, and might not return to camp until

morning or late in the night. Between the present and that hour the crisis must come. The question of life and death was to be met and answered before the rise of another sun.

The cowmen were certain that their approach had been noted from the range long before the halt took place. To push into the solitude would be to enter an ambushade from which none could escape. Not for a moment had there been a thought of attempting anything of that nature.

Goodale drew a white handkerchief from his pocket and handed it to Alf. He grasped one corner and, looking at the mountain spur, slowly fluttered it over his head.

"Use that glass of yours, tenderfoot, and tell me if you see anything."

Bob leveled the instrument, while the others used their eyes. As I have shown, the spur some two hundred yards distant rose abruptly from the plain. It reached a height of two or three thousand feet, with higher altitudes both to the north and south. Off to the right, the chain was split by a cañon with an irregular width of a hundred feet, more or less. Through the middle of this brawled a small stream, twisting around boulders and breaking

into foam. Instead, however, of flowing toward the group of horsemen, it made an abrupt turn, directly after leaving the spur, and took a southern course along its face, clinging to the base for a mile or more. The cañon was of the roughest character, with immense boulders and rocks tumbled about at the base of the vast, perpendicular walls, which were black or dark gray in color. Among these masses of stone, sycamores and cottonwoods grew at all angles, and from crevices in the walls a few stunted bushes protruded as if groping for the sunlight. High up the range were pines, some of considerable size.

The front of the range was too steep for a horse or any animal other than a chamois to climb. It would prove hard work even for mountaineers.

Arizona Alf waved the handkerchief from side to side, while his eyes roamed over the face of the mountain spur in front.

"Uncle," said Bob, without lowering his glass, "are the Apaches on the Reservation supplied with white linen handkerchiefs by the government?"

"No, because they would not be appreciated."

"How then does Alf expect his signal to be answered?"

"A wave of the hand, or a few shouted words will serve; do you note anything unusual through that glass?"

"I'm not sure," replied the youth a moment later. "I see something suspicious."

"Where?"

Bob handed the instrument to his relative.

"About two-thirds of the way to the summit, beside that high, dark rock, just where the gnarled pine puts out, I fancied I saw a movement and caught a glimpse of an Indian's face."

The rancher and his companions scrutinized the point with the closest attention. Alf was the first to speak:

"Something *is* there, but I can't make out clearly what it is; if it's an Apache, he isn't ready to show himself."

"Wants to admire us, I reckon," was the comment of Micah.

"There are two Apaches and one is peering over the head of the other who is crouching on the ground. The bush hides them except when the second reaches over the shoulder of the other and pulls the bush aside."

“Do they know we have discovered them?”

“I can’t tell, but it looks that way, for the buck at the rear has let the bush slip back in front of their faces again.”

“Alf,” said Micah, “shake your flag straight at ’em.”

CHAPTER XII

FACE TO FACE

ARIZONA ALF followed the suggestion. Once more he waved the white handkerchief to and fro in front of his face, while every eye was centered on the bush at the side of the rock, high up the mountain spur. That the two Apaches were there, and keenly watched the fluttering signal was not to be doubted, but they took care not to come into view, and the field glass which the rancher kept pointed gave not a glimpse of them.

"They're too bashful to show themselves," he remarked.

"No use of fooling any longer," exclaimed Alf impatiently, handing the handkerchief to its owner.

As he spoke, he wheeled his pony at right angles and struck into a gallop to the southward, the others imitating him. This quickly took them to the side of the brawling stream

which followed the course of the mountain spur. The ground became more broken and partook somewhat of the nature of foothills, though these were not extensive. It was hard traveling for the horses, but they were pushed, and in a brief time had gone an eighth of a mile. Then Alf turned again, this time to the left, and forced his horse among the cottonwoods, into the water and up the other bank, where he was among the trees again, with the others directly after him. Reining up, he slipped from the saddle.

"Micah is the only one among us that can talk Apache lingo," he said, in explanation of his action; "he is now to run things."

The tall cowboy nodded. He could speak the Indian tongue as well as a native, while his friends knew only a few words. He was ready for the perilous duty.

The plan was simple. Long Micah was to go forward on foot until he found the Apaches, who could be at no great distance. He took the white handkerchief from Goodale to use as a flag of truce. Geronimo and his bucks knew its character, though in their eyes it possessed no sacredness. He was to make known to whomsoever he met that his business

was with Cochita. It was reasonable to believe that when he proclaimed his errand, curiosity would lead Geronimo or his associates to bring the white man face to face with the young leader. That done, Micah would withdraw—if *permitted to do so*. None knew better than he the risk he was running, but there was no hesitation on his part. Five minutes after the halt among the cottonwoods, the brave fellow took his departure, and his companions were alone.

They had dismounted and stood beside one another, talking in low voices and with all their senses keyed to the highest alertness.

Bob supposed that the plan was for the three to wait where they were until Micah came back with his report, but he was mistaken.

"There's no need of our staying here," said his relative, addressing Alf; "we know enough to take care of ourselves, and through a little scouting may pick up a point or two that will prove worth while."

"I was thinking of the same thing," replied Alf.

"And what am I to do?" asked the surprised Bob.

"Stay here and guard the ponies," replied his relative; "I hope we sha'n't be away long, but you mustn't grow impatient. For the first time in your life," added the rancher impressively, "you are in the neighborhood of a war party of Apaches, the worst body of wretches on the American continent. If any harm comes to you, your father will never forgive me."

"But what of Minnie?" asked the distressed youth.

"Sad as is her situation, I'm not responsible for it, but I am partly responsible at least for you. I remind you of this that you may use every care to protect yourself."

And with a few words more, the two men disappeared as guardedly as their comrade had done a short time before.

Left to himself, it was not long before the gorge of Bob Goodale began to rise.

"All of them are scouting in the mountains; Micah has gone off by himself, and uncle and Alf have started on their account. I'm left here to take care of the ponies; they are afraid to have me go away from this spot, but suppose some of the Apaches find out where the horses have been left—and I'm sure they

already know it—and come down here to steal them, what can I do to prevent it? I can't fight a dozen of them, and I shall be in twice as much danger as any of the three. It's an imposition. Besides," he added, although he was already convinced by his arguments, "uncle and Alf have started on a blind hunt; they have no more chance of learning anything than I have; it may fall to my lot to discover the very thing they are so anxious to learn; I'll be hanged if I'll stand it!"

The bridles had been slipped from the ponies, who were cropping the bunch grass and twigs of greasewood which grew plentifully on the banks of the stream. They had eaten little or nothing since noon and were hungry. All were so well trained that they would not wander away and they were just as safe where they were without Bob as with him.

Night had closed in while the party was riding along the bank of the stream, and a gibbous moon was already in the sky. Objects could be seen on the plain for a distance of several rods, but among the trees all was profoundly dark. The rippling of the current around and over the stones and projecting roots drowned the noise made by the jaws of

the ponies, when cropping the grass and herbage. Now and then a muffled stamp sounded when one of them was pestered by some insect.

The youth and natural courage of Bob Goodale, together with his affection for his sister, made him more headlong than would have been the case in different conditions. He asked himself why, if his uncle could not remain idle while his wife was in peril, it should be expected of him, when his feelings were no less stirred.

"They may be gone half the night and I'm to wait, wait, while my heart is gnawed by the agony of suspense."

It was not until he had risen from the boulder on which he was sitting, that anything in the nature of hesitancy came to him. He was violating the orders of his uncle, whose responsibility in the circumstances could not have been greater or more delicate. Standing erect, with his Winchester grasped, Bob listened and peered into the shadows around.

As I have shown, he was wrapped in the gloom of the trees. He could not see the ponies. Even Pedro, who was not a dozen paces away, was invisible. The gurgle of

the current shut out the other sounds that would have reached him had he been farther from the stream.

The hesitation of the youth, however, lasted only for a minute or two. Since he and his friends had ridden south, the course he was to follow lay to the north, which led to where the glimpse of the faces of the Apache bucks had been caught. Moreover, all three of the men had taken that course.

"I'll follow, though it's likely I'll have to turn to the right or left; if when I come back, I find all the ponies gone, uncle will be angry; but if I stay here they are just as likely to be gone and me to be gone with them, so it's better as it is."

This reasoning was undoubtedly good, provided the premises were right.

Bob's sensations were novel when he found himself clear of the camp, as it may be called, and in the immediate neighborhood of a party of Apaches, who had defied the United States authorities and were raiding through the country, burning and killing like so many demons wherever and whenever the chance offered. What would be his own fate if he fell into their hands? There could be but

one answer and he shuddered at the thought of it.

What presumption on his part to measure wits with these pastmasters of fiendishness! He, a youth in his teens, who, only a few weeks before, was living on his father's farm far to the eastward, and who had never at that time seen a hostile Indian, was dropped into the heart of the Apache country, and now matched himself against the scourges.

Presumptuous it certainly was, but, having put his hand to the plow, Bob Goodale did not look back. Stepping softly, though with the gurgling of the stream so near, there was no need of it, the young man picked his way along the rocky, wooded bank until several rods from his starting point. He had climbed over some of the boulders, gone around others, turned to the right or to the left, slipping several times, switched in the face by the protruding limbs, which he could not see in the darkness, and still kept his progress northward until at the point named he came to a full stop.

The cause of this was that he found himself on the margin of a space, nearly fifty feet across, devoid of trees, and therefore of

shadow, except the patches cast by the rocks themselves. It was a curious break, which appeared only on the shore along which he was making his way. By wading the stream to the other side, he could avail himself of the gloom there, but he did not like such a recourse. Thus far he had kept his feet dry, and in the water he might meet with mishap. Surely there could be no risk worth taking into account in moving across the moonlit space into the shadows beyond.

And yet a strange misgiving held him back. He had read of disaster which had overtaken more than one scout, because of momentary carelessness or impatience, and he recalled an incident told by Arizona Alf of a similar nature which came within a hair of proving fatal to him.

So it was that when Bob glided cautiously out from the shadow, he assumed a crouching posture with his head on a level with the first boulder. He bent even lower than was necessary, advancing with such extreme care that at the end of a quarter of an hour he was hardly halfway to the other side.

Suddenly he found himself "up against it." He reached an immense rock that seemed to

stretch indefinitely to the right and left. The easiest course would be to hurry over the flat top, but that was a violation of his own rule, for it would be a full exposure of himself to anyone who might be near.

Suddenly Bob ducked his head. He either heard or fancied he heard the slightest possible disturbance. He was so far from the stream that he could detect faint noises of that nature. Drawing his revolver, he held it firmly grasped and waited. As the minutes wore past, he finally believed it was idle fancy. Then he slowly straightened up and peered over.

At the moment of doing so an Apache buck did precisely the same thing from the other side of the rock, and the two faced each other with no more than ten feet between them!

CHAPTER XIII

“BE OFF WITH YOU!”

IT must always remain a disputed question as to which was the more startled,—Bob Goodale or the Apache. The presumption is against the squat warrior from the San Carlos reservation.

For this reason: the two rose from behind the broad rock as slowly and evenly as if moved by the same mechanism. A spectator might have thought them automata with which the inventor was operating. Even after the two saw each other in the same instant, they continued to rise until their shoulders were in view. Each held a Winchester rifle, the buck in his right and the boy in his left hand. You will remember that Bob had drawn his revolver and grasped it in the other hand.

Suddenly he whirled the weapon round in front with the barrel on a level and pointed at the face of the amazed redskin.

“*Hands up!*” commanded Bob, in a low voice, as he rose, so that his body showed to the waist above the rock. It is hardly to be supposed that the buck had much knowledge of the English language, but it is still harder to believe that one of his people can be found who does not know the meaning of such a command, whether uttered in Apache, Spanish or English. At any rate, the dusky individual to whom the order was addressed was as prompt in obeying as any traveler has been in heeding the similar summons of a road agent or an enemy who has gained the drop on him.

As the hands reached for the stars, the rifle dropped to the ground beside the buck, and was hidden from the sight of his conqueror. It is because Bob had made himself master of the situation that I incline to the belief that his shock was less than that of the Apache. Anyhow, he rallied sooner.

As the two stood, the faint moonlight fell on the face of the Apache, while that of the youth was partly obscured in shadow.

The countenance thus revealed to Bob Goodale was repellent to the last degree. It was wide, with high cheek bones and small eyes that seemed to be placed in narrow slits,

though they glittered with the fierce light of a serpent. The long, black hair, parted in the middle, dangled over the shoulders and was without ornament. The face was free from paint, which in truth could not have added any hideousness to the countenance, shockingly disfigured by a huge scar that extended from one cheek across the nose, the cicatrice most likely a memorial of some cavalryman's sabre cut.

The picture of the Apache was one that Bob Goodale felt would remain vivid throughout his life. The fellow knew he was caught inextricably, and being a man who never showed mercy, he did not expect mercy himself. He must have wondered why the shot of the leveled weapon was delayed; perhaps the victor wished to enjoy his mental torture. If so, he should never see any wincing on the part of the redskin, one of the cardinal virtues of the race being the repression of all emotion, no matter how keen the anguish under which the victim may be suffering.

But it did not take our friend long to awaken to the fact that he was in the situation of the man who drew the white elephant in a lottery: he didn't know what to do with his

prize. As you can understand, the question was not one that would have troubled any of his friends. Short work would have been made of an Apache caught at any disadvantage. But Bob was not of such make. Much as he had learned about these scourges of the Southwest, he could no more shoot down a helpless warrior than he could have slain a white prisoner that had surrendered to him.

But what was to be done with his captive? Bob's first thought was of holding him as a hostage for his relatives, in the hands of Geronimo and his band. A moment's thought satisfied the youth that the plan was impracticable; to retain the redskin a secure prisoner would take unceasing vigilance, and a greater skill in woodcraft than Bob possessed. The chances were ten to one that the captive would gain some lightning-like advantage over him, and turn the tables with a vengeance.

No matter what the consequences might be, the Apache must be set free. Bob had no doubt as to that. It occurred to him that the buck might have some knowledge of English and could be utilized in opening communication with Cochita. He addressed a question to him:

"Is Cochita with your party?"

The Apache stared and mumbled something which Bob did not understand.

"Where is Geronimo?"

The result was equally void.

"Go! Clear out! Be off with you!"

This was said in a louder voice, as we often unconsciously speak, as if vigor of tone will make up for unfamiliarity of language.

To Bob's amazement, the buck instantly turned, picked up his rifle, and walked away. The gestures may have helped, but there could be no doubt of his reading the meaning of the words that set him free.

It would be interesting to know his sensations while walking away and during the few steps when he was the fairest kind of a target for the youth. He must have expected a shot with every moment. It has been said by brave men that the hardest thing in the world to do is to walk deliberately and dignifiedly when you are confident of serving as a target for one or more persons at the rear. Be that as it may, the Apache succeeded and, with his shoulders thrown forward, with silent step, and without once looking back, he moved toward the shadows on the other side of the

moonlit space and disappeared among them. Now, though Bob Goodale had been rash, he had learned too much in his brief stay in Arizona to put any trust in the gratitude or chivalry of an Apache. Instead of turning about and imitating the action of the freed captive, he stooped down, so as to be hidden by the rock which had been the cause of his singular adventure, and was almost as quick as the other in reaching the protecting gloom made by the cottonwoods.

Even before this the views of the young man had undergone a marked change. He understood now that the advice of his uncle was wise. It was probably true that in case of a demonstration against the ponies by any of the Apaches, the lad could do nothing to prevent their being stolen. The assignment of such duty was with the single purpose of keeping him out of the danger into which the men felt themselves obliged to plunge. The incident I have just related proved that Bob had no business to leave camp, for he had hardly done so when he almost ran against an Apache warrior, and, but for providential good fortune, it would have closed the youth's career then and there.

"Had I risen from behind the rock ten seconds sooner, it would have given him time to wipe me off the slate; it might have been as bad had I been ten seconds late in popping up; anyway I can't do any good away from camp, and, as uncle says, I must keep out of the game and leave it to them to play to the end."

A disquieting fact could not be overlooked: the buck had learned where he was, or substantially where he was waiting, and was certain to make it known to others of his tribe. What more likely than that they would visit the camp, run off the ponies, and probably add his scalp to the collection they were rapidly making? But in asking himself the last question, our young friend was unaware of the singular fact that the worst tribe of American Indians rarely take the scalp of an enemy.

"Such being the shape of things, it proves I ought to have stayed where I was told to stay. I don't think I shall tell anything of what happened to uncle, and there isn't any way that I can see by which he will hear of it."

When among the ponies that were still cropping the grass and twigs, Bob passed from

one to the other to make sure all was right. So far as he could tell, the animals had not been molested, and for the time they were secure.

He could not free himself, however, of a growing belief that trouble was at hand. The Apache whom he had spared would not rest with hurrying back to his comrades, but would seek to repay good with evil, as, I am grieved to say, is the rule with the majority of red men, no matter what may be said to the contrary.

Since the youth could put up no kind of a fight against the dusky raiders, so long as he was without the help of his friends, he did a clever thing. Slipping the bit of his bridle between the jaws of Pedro, and securing it in place, he swung into the saddle and guided the pony to the edge of the stream, into which the animal carefully stepped. The other horses paid no heed to his movements. Pedro picked his way across, the water nowhere rising above his knees, and moved out into the fringe of trees on the other side. His rider guided him to the edge of the plain, intending to ride farther. His plan was to prevent the capture of his pony in case the

Apaches came for the animals. Mounted on the fleet Pedro, with his course unobstructed, he could laugh to scorn all attempts to overtake him.

Bob had ridden but a few paces beyond the edge of the timber, when Pedro snuffed, threw up his nose, and stopped. He had discovered something suspicious, and a glance out on the dimly lit plain showed his young master what it was.

Something like a hundred feet away, a horseman had reined up the moment before, as if he were first in making the mutual discovery. Rider and pony were as motionless as an equestrian statue, but there could be no doubt that the man was studying the one who had just emerged from among the trees, as if not satisfied with his appearance.

Bob and Pedro assumed precisely the same pose, and thus, for two or three minutes, the strangers faced each other. Neither spoke, and the ponies seemed to partake of the mutual distrust of their riders. The youth believed the other was an Apache buck, but in the dim moonlight he could not make certain. In such circumstances it is always prudent to give yourself the benefit of the doubt, and he

resolved that the first demonstration should come from the other.

And so it did. Suddenly, without the least warning, Bob saw a flash, heard a sharp report, and a bullet whizzed so close to his cheek that he felt its breath. The horseman who fired the treacherous shot instantly wheeled, threw himself forward on the neck of his pony, and dashed off at headlong speed.

"If there was enough light for me to see clearly, I'd have a try at you," muttered the indignant youth; "but as there isn't, I won't waste my ammunition; so good-bye for the present."

CHAPTER XIV

IN THE APACHE CAMP

ONLY those who took part in the running down of Geronimo and his band, or in similar enterprises, can comprehend the difficulty of surprising those dusky raiders. Knowing that the United States cavalry would press them to the limits of human endurance, the fugitives called into play all the subtle skill of which they were pastmasters. When their camp had been located in the depths of some rugged mountain, the soldiers, under the lead of the scouts, many of whom were friendly Apaches, crept slowly and patiently for hours through the silent gloom of the night, only to find perhaps that the loosening of a pebble, the snapping of a twig, the half-spoken word, or the rustling of a carbine had betrayed the secret, and the bucks had scattered like a covey of quail.

Long Micah understood clearly the task he had undertaken. He was about to enter,

or at least to attempt to enter, the Apache camp in the Santa Catalina range. He knew it was not far off, and that the dusky sentinels were alert, but you will not forget the peculiarity of the situation: he wished to let the Apaches know of his coming. Nothing was easier, and therein lay his real peril. Being seen first, his greeting was likely to be a rifle shot or a stealthy blow in the darkness. To succeed, he must make himself known and be accepted for what he claimed to be,—a messenger entering the hostile camp under a flag of truce.

He was a veteran of the Southwestern frontier. He had taken part in more than one fight with the Apaches when on their raids, but his only advantage over his friends was in his knowledge of the native tongue. A natural facility in acquiring languages had enabled him to speak it almost as well as Geronimo or Cochita himself. He had often served as interpreter, because of which fact he was well known to many of the Warm Spring Apaches. He had talked with Geronimo when he was a good Indian on the Reservation, and that wily old miscreant once complimented him on his proficiency, grimly

remarking that all he needed was a darker skin in order to be as good an Apache as the rest of them.

The hope of the cowboy was that the leader was somewhere else. Possibly he was pushing his flight to Mexico. If he were out of the way, Cochita was the all-important individual to see. Even if both were in the same camp, the younger was a formidable rival. If Cochita knew of the misfortune to Minnie Goodale and her aunt, there could be no call for the services of Micah or any of his male friends. There was the problem which the brave scout had set out to solve.

Daniel Boone or Simon Kenton never made a more stealthy and skilful advance than did Long Micah around the rocks and boulders, and amid the stunted pines, after leaving his companions at the base of the mountain beside the little stream of water. He steadily climbed, heading for the spot where they had had a glimpse of the faces of the two bucks, peering out upon him and his friends when riding across the plain. Half the distance was traversed with hardly any more noise than that made by the creeping moonlight, and then he abruptly stopped.

It cannot be said that the scout had heard anything, but he was guided by that mysterious intuition which is sometimes called the sixth sense. He knew that one or more enemies were near him. Whether on either hand, in front, or at the rear, remained to be learned. He did not make the mistake that Bob Goodale made about the same time; for, being in the shadow of a rock, he stayed there, avoiding the soft moonlight on his right as he would have shunned a pestilence.

Five, ten minutes passed without bringing any further knowledge to him. His Winchester was in his left hand, but his right rested on his revolver at his hip. That was the weapon to be used in such a situation.

"I know that one of 'em is somewhere about and more likely there are more of 'em," was his thought; "this thing may keep up for an hour, so here goes!"

Raising his voice enough to reach several rods away, he said in Apache:

"I am looking for Geronimo; I come as a friend; I bear a flag of truce."

A goodly part of this introduction was useless. In the first place, it wasn't worth while to refer to the flag of truce, while the state-

ment that he was seeking the Apache camp as a friend of Geronimo would not be credited. But the announcement itself ought to modify whatever view the hostiles prowling near might have held.

And so it did. In the minute of silence which followed, Micah succeeded in locating his man. He was behind the boulder on his right. A space of only two or three feet separated the respective shadows. The Apache might have bounded across this at a single leap, but refrained from doing so under the belief that he would not catch the scout unprepared. The latter's hesitation showed that his suspicion had been stirred, and his kind were not those that could be taken off their guard. It would have been equally easy to shoot the intruder, provided he could be placed with sufficient exactness, but the shadow in which he kept prevented that. The wounding of the scout would insure the death of the buck who wounded him, and, no matter how brave the aborigine may appear in certain circumstances, he "side-steps" when all the chances are against him.

Thus matters stood until the knot was cut by the words of Long Micah. The buck to

whom they were addressed was silent for a moment. He must have known that if this visitor bore a message to the great chief, the latter would wish to know its nature, even though it could make no difference in his daring plans. Extraordinary as was the turn in matters, the warrior must help the white man to secure the opening he was seeking.

"Come with me and we will go to Geronimo, but you are taking your life in your hands."

I may say at this point that the conversation which follows, as well as those that come after it, is translated very liberally. You will prefer that such should be the case, for the reading will be better understood.

Moreover, it was necessary that the couple, each of whom hated the other, should affect a confidence that it was impossible to feel. Otherwise, nothing could be done.

As the Apache uttered the words given, he straightened up and stepped into the moonlit space. Micah was hardly behind him in doing the same. The scout had brought out the white handkerchief of the rancher, and held it in his right hand, his revolver having been shoved back in place. Micah did not

believe the buck would attempt any treachery at this stage, but the scout was on the alert. None could draw quicker than he.

The Apache, having faced the visitor, said:
"I will show you the way."

And he began climbing the mountain. To do this, he placed himself in front of the white man, who thus held him at his mercy. It would have been the easiest thing in the world to strike down the barbarian, but nothing could have been farther from the intentions of Long Micah.

The singular tramp led around boulders and rocks as before, and once or twice the leader had to make considerable detours. All the time, however, he was climbing, Micah was certain they were seen by other sentinels, but there was no interference. They must have looked upon the white man as a prisoner, too well secured for them to offer aid.

The walk ended sooner than the scout expected. He was on the watch for the glimmer of a camp fire, but there was nothing of the kind. The Apaches were too wise to run the risk when it really was a risk. They could have stood a much greater degree of cold at night, and meat raw was as palatable

to them as when cooked. On the edge of a small plateau of less than an acre in extent, the guide halted. Micah did the same, but first came up so as to stand beside the other. The little act was meant to show his good faith.

Peering into the gloom which surrounded this bare space, the scout could not catch the first sign of other persons, but, none the less, they were near, and he was not surprised when in answer to a low, peculiar whistle of his attendant, a figure emerged from the darkness opposite and walked slowly toward them. He was of stocky build, and though, as I have said, the night was not very crisp, he wore a blanket wrapped about his shoulders and dangling to his knees. His head was uncovered except by the coarse, abundant black hair, there not being so much as an ornamental feather in sight.

The moment he came into the field of vision, Micah suspected his identity. He had advanced only a few paces when he recognized the broad, hard face with its deep lines and saturnine expression.

It was Geronimo, chief of the Warm Spring band of Apaches.

That he was equally quick to detect the identity of the white man was proved by his question before he halted in front of him.

"You are Long Micah; how dare you come here?"

With a smile, the visitor gently waved the handkerchief in front of his face.

"Do you come from General Crook?"

"No; I come to the great Geronimo to ask his permission to speak to Cochita."

"He is not here; he is a long way off."

"Will you direct me where to find him?"

"Why do you wish to see him?"

"I bear him a message about one of his friends."

"Who is he?"

"It is a young woman whom he knew when in the East."

"What is the message?"

Geronimo was pushing his questions and Micah could hardly parry them.

"She was on her way to the ranch of Goodale; she has fallen into the hands of some of your men and begs Cochita's protection."

"Why does she not ask the protection of Geronimo?"

"Will you give it?"

"No; nor will Cochita; he has no friends among the white people," replied the chief angrily, though he did not raise his voice.

"May I speak with Cochita?"

"No."

Micah bowed:

"I am sorry, but I must go back to her friends with your words and they will be disappointed."

CHAPTER XV

A FAILURE

THIS was the crisis of the extraordinary situation. Within a few minutes after the arrival of Long Micah, in what may be called the invisible camp of the Warm Spring band of Apaches, he stood face to face with death.

Having been allowed to walk unharmed into the presence of the terrible Geronimo, would he be permitted to withdraw therefrom, as if making a call upon one of his own neighbors? Every condition answered in the negative. That dreaded chief was only fairly started on his great raid, when, naturally, his spirits were high and he dared defy the national government as he had successfully done more than once before.

The flag of truce means nothing to his race. He had ignored it during the brief interview, though it was dallied in his face. More than all, the visitor had asked to be allowed to see

Cochita, whom the old miscreant regarded with a jealousy hardly short of hatred. Micah's first plan was to ask the sentinel to be taken directly to Cochita, and to make no mention of the elder leader, but the course he followed was more politic.

Had he lingered or continued his appeals, the scout would probably have been struck down where he stood, though he would have given a good account of himself before "hitting the long trail." But the conversation was brief. A few sentences were exchanged and then, announcing his intended return, Micah wheeled on his heel to leave the camp.

No more trying ordeal had ever come to him or could ever come to him again, than that of the next few minutes. He had turned his back upon Geronimo and the guide who had brought him thither; for the latter stood only a few paces distant during the interview. He yearned to make a dash, but that would have hastened the calamity he was trying to escape. He would have invited certain attack.

He walked with deliberation, no slower and no faster than when he came out of the gloom into the moonlit space. He held his breath, with his nerves on edge; he was prepared to

draw and open fire on the instant he was assailed, though a shot from the rear might well bring him down without the ability to use even his smaller weapon.

It was the very abruptness of his action that disarmed Geronimo, generally so quick in resources, for the instant. Before he fairly comprehended what had been done, the athletic form was fading in the shadows. A white man had been allowed not only to enter his camp, but to go away again! Was the chief dreaming?

If so, he speedily awoke. He uttered a few angry words to the buck who had brought the intruder into camp, and the savage whisked across the moonlit space into the gloom, close upon the heels of the scout. None could have been more eager to obey the command of Geronimo, but the barbarian did not forget that he was pursuing no amateur. The encounter by the rock had given the buck a good idea of the white man's woodcraft.

The Apache sped as if treading on velvet. He knew the course taken by the other, and the pursuer did not turn to the right nor the left. Unless the man was running, he ought to be seen in the course of two or three

minutes. Failing to see him, the buck halted abruptly and listened. He was now among the shadows, where his eyes gave only slight help.

Instead of detecting the guarded movement of someone, it was a voice that fell upon his ears,—a voice so low that it could not have been heard more than a few paces away.

“Why is my brother in such haste?”

“A white man has been in camp; he came as a messenger to Geronimo; I have been sent to overtake and slay him.”

“Why was he allowed to go?”

“He went in great haste; he must have passed this way.”

“He did; I heard someone hurry through the wood and among the rocks.”

“Which path did he take?”

“He came over the ground that you are traversing; he cannot be far off.”

“I shall soon be with him; do you wish to help slay him?”

“I will leave that to my brother; I must wait here on guard; Geronimo gave me the orders and I cannot disobey him.”

The pursuer was off the next moment, exasperated at the thought that the white

man's chances of escape were growing with every passing second.

Now, if the buck had asked the name of the one who had given him the last information and that one had answered truly, the Apache would have learned that it was Micah Polk, more generally known as Long Micah.

If the latter had been dignified when striding across the moonlit plateau, where he held his unsatisfactory interview with Geronimo, he threw that dignity to the winds in the same instant that he knew he was hidden from sight by the enveloping shadows. In truth, he hurried so fast that he was in danger of detection by some of the sentinels that were posted on every side of the Apache camp. Finding his pursuer drawing uncomfortably near, he halted in the gloom and exchanged with him the few words recorded. Waiting only until he knew nothing was to be feared from the Apache, Micah resumed his withdrawal from the dangerous neighborhood, making sure that he kept to the safest course in doing so.

The visit to Geronimo's camp had been a failure, and now that it was over, Long Micah asked himself how he came to expect it could

result any other way, in view of the circumstances in which it was made. He ought to have known that all that would come of an interview with the chieftain was the simple placing of himself in deadly peril. The only possibility of success had been in seeing Cochita first. But the scout had not the remotest idea of where to look for him. No dependence could be placed upon Geronimo's declaration that the dusky youth was a good way off. Even if he were, where should he be sought? It was just as likely he was within a brief distance of the camp. It might be, too, that the women were with the main band, in which case Geronimo would take good care that they were kept beyond reach of anything that Cochita could do in the way of rescuing them.

Considerably depressed by the report he was forced to carry back, Micah threaded his way with the utmost care among the rocks and boulders and trees, never forgetful of the probability of running into danger at any moment. Geronimo was not the wily miscreant he had proved himself to be without retaining his wonderful woodcraft, which enabled him to outwit the United States

troopers time and again. Micah could not forget his own narrow escape, nor the many lessons learned when he was a younger man.

He steadily worked his way down the mountain slope toward the spot where he had parted from his friends and the ponies. He had nearly reached the rendezvous when the faintest possible rustling directly in front warned him to be on guard. He had paused near the scene of the meeting between Bob Goodale and the Apache at which the youth cleverly got the better of the other.

It was the ear that gave the warning, and Micah was able to tell the point whence the almost imperceptible disturbance came. Naturally it was among the shadows and he who caused it was as well screened as himself.

The next instant the silence was pierced by a low, tremulous whistle repeated three times. Micah grinned, and, puckering his lips, sent back a similar response. At the same time he moved toward the point. Someone came in his direction and before either saw the other, each indulged in a slight chuckle. Then Long Micah and Arizona Alf came together.

"Where's Hi?" asked the former.

"Right here with me; we sot out to take

a look at things, but hadn't tried long, when we made up our minds that we couldn't give you any help—here he is."

The rancher came out of the gloom and the three friends were together. Standing thus and speaking in low tones, with the eyes and ears of all open, Long Micah told the story of his failure to gain any tidings of the women or of Cochita.

"I'm disgusted," he added, "but I'm not ready to give up. How do you two feel?"

"Never say die," replied Alf. The rancher, who had so much more at stake, was partly prepared for the disappointment, and, strange as it may sound, was more hopeful than either.

"None of us has thought of anything else since we learned what has happened. I can't see how Cochita can be ignorant of the plight of my wife and niece; it must be known throughout the Apache camp."

"That's true, Hi, provided Cochita is in the neighborhood, but I've had the idea for some time that the Apaches this time are split up into two parties, with Geronimo at the head of one and him at the head of the

other. There's a big lot of hatred between the young and the old leader."

"But in making their rush for Old Mexico they are sure to keep together, unless they are so hard pressed that each one has to look out for himself."

"That's what they'll do, but each will also do a little independent work. Now, Hi, since you are a brave man, I may as well tell you what I believe."

"Let me hear."

"Cochita isn't strong enough to dare show any mercy to his captives in the face of Geronimo's opposition. If he doesn't get the chance to save the women before Geronimo can lay hands on them, it will be too late."

"And you think that is what has happened?"

"No; I don't mean to say that, but at best the chances are even; if Cochita gains the custody of our friends soon enough, he will probably manage to take care of them. Whether he has done so or not is for us to learn, and if they are not saved this night, they will not be saved at all."

"I think as you do."

The three were so near what they called

their camp, that they made their way thither. It had become necessary to formulate their plans, and young Bob Goodale must understand the new phase in the situation.

When they got to camp they found their three ponies undisturbed, but Bob Goodale and Pedro were nowhere to be seen.

CHAPTER XVI

THE HOLD-UP

MINNIE GOODALE was never in brighter spirits than when she took her seat in the old stage at Raymond with her aunt, and, everything having been made secure, Jud Staples jerked the lines, cracked his whip, and the two horses broke into a jogging trot toward the north. The terminus of the line was the little station of Corlita, as you will remember, some twenty miles away. There they expected to find the waiting ponies and ride to the ranch, as the brother and uncle had done several weeks before.

It was a long and dusty ride in the train, and few persons would have viewed the journey in the stage with pleasure, for the day was very warm and no shade protected them for any part of the distance. The only halt that Jud expected to make was the usual one at Dead Man's Crossing, halfway out; but

the sky was as blue and clear as that of Italy, and, despite the heat of the day, the air was full of life and vigor, as if ozone was in every pulsation.

The elder woman sat on the rear seat, and Minnie in the middle, while the grinning Jud, who was captivated by the cheerful, merry girl, sat sideways, so as to give more attention to his passengers than to his team. Indeed, the latter required no care at all, for they could have made the trip as well at midnight as when the sun was shining.

"Only to think," said Minnie, who had learned everything that was to be learned about the journey from her aunt; "long before dark we shall be at that queer little place which you call Corlita, and there we shall find our ponies. Auntie, they won't forget to meet us?"

"No fear of that; I sent word to Hiram and you did to Bob, and they are too anxious to see us to run any chances of leaving us in the lurch."

"It wouldn't be so very awful if they did; you could give us accommodations at Corlita, Mr. Staples, couldn't you?"

"Zeke Connor and his wife would be

mighty glad to do so, but, miss, I wish to observe that my name is 'Jud' and not 'Mr. Staples.' Zeke and me wouldn't feel very bad if you found it necessary to stay there over night."

"We'll do so some time, Jud; for I mean to see everything."

"How long do you expect to stay in this part of Arizona?"

"A whole week."

The old fellow threw back his head and laughed heartily but silently.

"Make it six months or a year and you could throw a purty good bluff, but a week won't give you time to do more'n turn round."

"You don't know what plans Bob and I have fixed between us; he has promised to take me miles and miles over the plains, into the mountains, and off on the ranges where Uncle Hiram's thousands of cattle are grazing—Jud, what do you call a young woman who knows as much about handling cattle as a man does?"

"I never heerd of no such females."

"Well, you will know one when she has been here a week. It wouldn't do to speak of her as a cowboy, would it?"

"I think 'tomboy' would be the proper word," suggested the aunt, smiling at the effervescence of her niece.

"I don't care what you call me, so long as I get the fun. Don't you think it would be romantic, Jud, if we could have a flurry—just a little one—with the Apaches?"

The veteran slowly turned his face and looked fixedly into the glowing countenance. He did not smile and was never more impressive.

"Miss, I don't like to hear you talk in that style; them 'Paches ain't no joking matter."

"Doesn't our government keep them safe on the Reservation?"

"It hasn't always done that, and I'm afeard it won't always do it; they may break away any time, and when they do the only place for women and children to be is somewhere else. No, Minnie, the best view of a 'Pache is away off, with him heading the t'other way."

"Well, I shan't worry about them; you have strong adobe houses in this part of the world that are secure against the worst they can do."

"That would be well enough if the 'Paches didn't tackle anything but the adobe places, and was also so kind as to send a brass band

ahead when they mean to call; but they have a way of doing things with a rush, and tackling cowpunchers when they're miles from the ranch houses and haven't no airthly show for themselves. Better cut out them trips you and your brother are thinking of taking among the foothills and mountains."

"Now, Jud, you needn't think you are going to frighten me by such talk; I guess I can stand it if you and aunty and uncle and the rest of you can."

It was in this mood that the little party drew near Dead Man's Crossing. The elder woman spoke only now and then, for she preferred to listen to the chatter of her niece and the quaint remarks of the stage driver, who had formed a liking for her. The last word from the ranch was that all was quiet and the wife did not dream that there was any cause for immediate fear. They did not meet or see a single person on the way northward, and, although Jim Leedon at that very hour was scurrying over the sandy plain bearing his fateful message to the widely scattered ranches, he uttered no warning to Jud Staples, who was steadily pushing into the zone of danger.

The tired horses whinnied faintly as they moved down the slope to the little stream at Dead Man's Crossing. Jud Staples stopped them, walked out a step or two on the tongue, and released the check reins. Then, as he resumed his seat, they stepped slowly into the current and drank their fill. Resuming their walk, they struck the hard earth again and started up the opposite incline.

It was at that moment that a thin puff of smoke was seen at the top of the slope, a whip-like crack sounded, and Jud Staples, without a word or outcry, sagged sideways and sank down in the front of the stage. His life had gone out as suddenly as if smitten by a bolt from the sky. Neither Minnie Goodale nor her aunt comprehended what had taken place, until they saw three hideous forms rise seemingly out of the very ground, with the sand and dirt streaming from them, and leap down the incline in front of the ponies, who snuffed with fear, backed a few paces, and stood still.

"They are Apaches!" gasped the elder woman.

"I have my revolver," replied the frightened Minnie, thrusting her hand into the

pocket of her dress, with the intention of using the weapon upon their assailants.

"Don't do it!" interposed her aunt, catching her arm; "save it till you need it more."

"I don't see when that can be," replied Minnie, who nevertheless refrained in obedience to the command of one who understood the frightful peril better than she.

Each of the bucks carried a Winchester, while a knife was thrust into the belt which spanned his waist. They showed little or no interest in the silent form huddled in front of the stage, but, coming to the front of the vehicle, two of them unhooked the traces and led the animals free from the stage. The third, who was the one that had fired the fatal shot, beckoned to the terrified women.

"Come—come to ground."

"We must obey," replied the elder, rising to her feet, pushing open the door at the side; and, placing her foot on the iron step, she stood the next instant on the ground. With a single light leap, Minnie dropped beside her. She slyly slipped her hand down beside her dress. The revolver was there.

Her relative seemed to read her thoughts.

"You might shoot both, but there are others near."

"I shall have one or two shots left for them."

"Save the charges for a while; you are sure to need them."

Having freed the ponies, the two warriors who had them in charge flung off the harness, leaving only the bridles. Then two of them bestrode one of the animals, while the third mounted the other. This one reached out his hand with a grin to help the younger woman up in front of him. The sturdy girl recoiled and shook her head.

"I will not! And if you know what's best for you, you won't try to compel me."

Her action more than her words told the buck her resolution. He turned his head and spoke for a minute or two to his companions. Then he pointed toward the mountain spur to the eastward, nodded his head, and repeated several times: "Go—go—go!"

"He means that we are his prisoners; the rest of his men are in the hills; we have no choice for the present except to do as he says."

Minnie looked back at the stage, standing lonely and with its dreadful load. Jud

Staples had driven his ponies for the last time. He had crossed the Great Divide. Strangely, perhaps, the Apaches did not touch his body. That tribe, as I have said, does not as a rule, take the scalps of its victims.

When the command had been repeated, Mrs. Goodale started at a moderate pace over the sandy plain with her niece stepping close behind her. One pony with its double load walked on the left, and the other on the right. Now and then they exchanged a word or two, but nothing that was said was understood by the captives.

"I am afraid that that is the last of our trunks," remarked Minnie, who in the awful minutes, and with the memory of the tragedy oppressing her, could speak lightly.

"It is a matter not worth thinking of; more than likely we shall never need them again."

The remarkable party had advanced only a little way in the order named, when the Apache seated alone on one of the animals checked him, gazed off to the westward, swung his rifle over his head, and shouted some exclamation. Through the hot, pulsing air came the reply, and looking in that direction, the women saw four other Apaches, all

mounted, coming toward them at a swinging gallop. The hearts of the hapless prisoners sank, and Minnie, despite her impatience, felt that her aunt did well when she prevented her from firing her weapon. A more critical emergency was likely to arise at any moment. She must keep the revolver for that time which she prayed would never come, but which she was certain would nevertheless overtake the two in the very near future.

CHAPTER XVII

A FRIEND (?)

THE horsemen, for some unaccountable reason, reined up while still a hundred yards away, and, with that space separating the parties, the two talked for several minutes. Then the four wheeled and galloped to the Crossing, where the stage stood with the body of the veteran driver. It was these later arrivals who played havoc with the vehicle, trunks, and property that remained. Why they did not join the first three was more than our friends could understand, but doubtless the explanation would have been found in the words that passed between the raiders.

Minnie stepped beside her aunt, and the two, at the command of their captors, resumed their walk toward the mountain spur some two miles to the eastward. For half the space, not a word was spoken by captors or captive. The women were unspeakably depressed, and neither could think

of anything to say to comfort the other. The elder knew too well what all this meant. There had been another break from the Reservation by Geronimo or some of the leaders, whose trail would be marked by blood, desolation, and death. She knew the intense distrust of Cochita felt by her husband, and she had never fully shared it, but there could be no mistake as to the outbreak. Naturally she was anxious regarding her husband and nephew, though it may be said they were always prepared for a revolt on the part of the Apaches, who had caused our government much trouble for many years.

"There is one thing that gives me hope," said the aunt, reaching out and clasping the hand of her young friend.

"What is that?"

"We ourselves have been offered no harm; that is contrary to the rule which prevails when the Apaches are on one of their raids."

"And why have we been spared?"

"You have told me a good deal about Cochita, whom Hiram detests beyond the power of words to express. Despite his youth, he is a rival of Geronimo; it looks as if he had given orders that no harm should befall you."

"But, aunty," said the perplexed girl, "how could he know that I am expected in this part of the world? We have just arrived and are on our way to your home, when the stage is attacked by some of his tribe; why they did not serve us as they did poor Jud, is beyond my power to understand. Can you explain it?"

"No; I cannot answer your question, unless Cochita may have learned the truth from Bob or Hiram, and yet I don't see how that could be——"

Minnie was giving all her attention to her aunt, their hands still joined. In their deep interest in the situation, they forgot the three Apaches for the moment, though the soft crunching sound made in the sand by the hoofs of the horses was ever in their ears, and the two had but to glance up to see the abominated red men, the most repellent and terrible beings that imagination can picture.

They had approached quite near the mountain, and Minnie was talking to her relative when she felt her left arm seized in a grip of iron. She uttered an exclamation of dismay and pain, and whirled about to find the hideous face of the Apache who was riding single

almost against her own. He had leaned over with the intention of lifting her to the back of the pony in front of him. Indeed, so terrific was his grip that the girl was raised partially from her feet in the same moment that she was seized by the dusky miscreant, whose actions were complacently watched by the other two grinning bucks.

It was all done in a flash. Minnie Goodale was beside herself with fear and anger. Her right hand was thrust into the pocket of her dress, the revolver was snatched out, and the muzzle almost touched the coppery nose, when she pulled the trigger. Rarely does an Indian die without a wild outcry like that of a dumb animal when smitten, but, in this instance, he remained as mute as Jud Staples when slain by the Winchester of the same wretch. He lurched from the back of the horse, his head plunged against the soft, yielding sand, and he turned a half somersault, flopping over on his back as dead as Julius Cæsar.

In her excitement, the girl would have fired the remaining charges at the other Apaches, who seemed dazed by what had taken place, but again her aunt interposed.

"You mustn't! you mustn't, Minnie! you have no supply of cartridges and you must save what are left! They will be needed!"

"I will not use them unless they try to harm us."

The girl had regained her wonderful nerve. She watched the two, determined to fire on the first demonstration by either. It is impossible to say how the startling incident would have ended, but for an interference.

In these dreadful moments, the whole party heard the call of some one from the direction of the mountains in front. Looking thither, a single horseman was seen coming toward them at a rapid gallop. He was waving his hand above his head and shouting something in Apache, which was evidently a command to the two bucks, for they sat quiescent and watched him as he rapidly approached.

Minnie and her aunt naturally studied the newcomer, for it might be he was as much to be dreaded as their immediate captors. But Mrs. Goodale exclaimed in a low, excited tone:

"Do you see who it is, Minnie?"

"How should I know him?" asked the astonished girl.

“It is Cochita.”

Even as the elder spoke, the girl recognized the remarkable youth, who, as he drew near, slackened the pace of his animal, and smilingly made a graceful military salute. He would have removed his hat, had he not been without any hat to remove.

In that brief moment of marvelous silence, Minnie Goodale could not help recalling her last meeting with this Apache. He had been fashionably dressed, and it was at a prominent ball in the City of Philadelphia.

Hardly had the pony stopped, when Cochita slipped from its back which held no saddle, and, with a winning smile that displayed his handsome teeth, offered his hand to Minnie, who, before taking it, slipped her revolver into her pocket.

“I am always glad to see you, Miss Goodale, though I can hardly say the present circumstances might not have been more pleasant.”

“It all seems like a dream, Cochita,—I mean what has taken place within the last hour or two.”

“But I hope the end will be all right.”

“What is the meaning of this, Cochita?” asked Mrs. Goodale; “while riding quietly

in the stage, we were attacked at the Crossing by three Apaches; poor Jud was killed and the warriors set off to drive us to the mountains yonder; one of them laid his hand on my niece and she shot him."

"And she did right!" said the Apache, with a flash of his black eyes; "had I been here I should have saved her the trouble. You ask me the meaning of this, Mrs. Goodale," he added, turning to the elder; "I cannot tell you how much I am grieved over what has taken place. Geronimo and a number of his men have left the Reservation and are doing much mischief."

"Have any of my people been harmed?" asked the woman. Cochita smiled and shook his head.

"I am glad to say that your people are always ready and Geronimo therefore wastes no time on them. He knows the cavalry will be close behind, and he can't linger on the road."

"But how is it, Cochita, that *you* are among them?"

"As soon as I learned of Geronimo's break, I set out to persuade as many of his bucks as I could to return to the Reservation. Fail-

ing to do that, I shall give all the help I can to drive them back."

"How are you succeeding?" asked Minnie, looking into the smiling face of the dusky youth, who showed his chivalry by drawing the women far enough away from the inanimate form to talk without seeing it. The Apaches, each now on a horse, sat as stolid and seemingly uninterested as two wooden figures.

"It is a little too early to judge, but I have had some success and believe I shall have more."

"The least that you can do, Cochita," said Mrs. Goodale, "is to escort *us* home."

"Be assured that nothing can give me more pleasure, and I regret that I cannot do so at once."

"What hinders?"

"I must take time to procure suitable saddles."

"We can walk," said Minnie, unable to hide her eagerness to get away from the neighborhood and to the ranch house with the least possible delay.

"It is a long distance and I shall be pained to have you do so, but it shall be as you say. However, we must be very cautious."

"What need when *you* are our escort?"

"Geronimo is enraged with me; when he and I meet, we shall probably come to violence and one of us may kill the other; he is but a little way from here in the mountains; he will take up his flight again before many hours; I wish him not to see or know of you until it is too late for him to do any harm."

"Is not the best way, then, to hurry home or to Corlita, where we shall be safe with Zeke Connor?" asked Mrs. Goodale.

"That is the plan I have in mind, but we must wait until night has come."

"What need of that?"

"The Apaches are roaming everywhere; they will be sure to discover us before we go far, and then we shall be in great danger."

"You will have these two to help defend us, if they molest you, which it seems to me they will not dare to do."

"These two cannot be relied upon; they would join the others, who would be more anxious to please Geronimo than me."

"What, then, do you propose?" asked Minnie.

"To travel a little way to the northward until beyond Geronimo's camp, and then to

remain out of sight until night has fully come. It is not far off."

As if the question was settled, Cochita bounded upon the back of his pony, expressing his regrets that he should ride while the ladies had to walk.

"I shall make the distance as brief as I can," he added, turning the head of the animal more to the northward. As he was doing so, Mrs. Goodale whispered to her niece:

"He is deceiving us; he is more to be feared than Geronimo."

CHAPTER XVIII

SHUT IN

WE must not lose sight of Bob Goodale, in his great distress of mind over the awful fate that threatened his sister and aunt.

It did seem as if some malignant obduracy of events joined to baffle the good intentions of him and his friends, and to increase the danger of his beloved relatives.

Had it been a half hour later that the walk of the two women took place, Bob surely must have discovered them with the aid of his field glass; but while he was not many miles distant, they had passed out of his field of vision. Stranger perhaps than all, when the veterans, Hiram Goodale, Arizona Alf, Long Micah, and the youth rode eastward toward the same spur of the Santa Catalina, they took it for granted that the women with their escort had pushed directly on to the mountains. As a consequence the pursuers

entered the solitude at a point not far removed from the camp of Geronimo, but a considerable distance from where Cochita had escorted the captives.

Recalling the incidents of that memorable night, you will remember that our young friend Bob, after being left to look after the ponies, ventured on a little scout of his own, from which he returned without having achieved a very pronounced success. He crossed the stream on the back of Pedro, and in the gloom of the early evening, rode out on the sandy plain over which he had come earlier in the afternoon. To enliven proceedings, he received a shot from an Indian horseman who scurried off unharmed, as must have been the case when Bob did not so much as fire at him.

"It strikes me that I'm not considered of much account in this business," mused our young friend, with just a tinge of resentment; "Uncle Hiram brings me along with him and Alf and Micah, but when there's any work to be done they leave me out of the calculation; I don't know that there is anything for me to do out here on the plain, but anyway I've got more elbow room than

among the trees at the foot of the mountain. Hello!"

Looking to the northward he saw a vivid and increasing glare in the horizon. With his eyes fixed upon it, he checked Pedro and sat for some minutes looking upon the sight, the meaning of which he knew only too well.

"I don't know whose ranch it is, but whoever he may be, he has received a visit from the Apaches. There are more things to be burned there than at our place or at Zeke Connor's and it is all going up in flame and smoke. And the women and children——!"

Bob shuddered and did not complete the sentence.

For a minute or two Pedro seemed as much interested as his rider in the ominous glare in the northern sky; for he stood with head erect, ears pricked forward, and rigid as a statue. Then with a peculiar flirt, he turned his head without shifting his body so as to look to the right, or in the direction of the mountain spur which he had left but a short time before. At the same time, he snorted, as may be said, in an undertone.

It was proof that he had discovered something to cause misgiving. The trained pony

of the West is often a better sentinel than his master. Bob strove to peer into the gloom. He could dimly see prominent objects for a hundred feet or less, but could discover nothing to explain the unrest of Pedro.

To withdraw from the presence of the danger meant to withdraw farther from the camp, where he hoped to rejoin his friends. Bob did not wish to do this, but he thought the situation warranted his riding a few rods, when he halted again. As before, his pony faced to the eastward and emitted the faint warning that something in that direction did not please him.

Since his eyes were of no assistance, Bob Goodale now resorted to an artifice of which he had read, and which his uncle told him he had used in more than one instance. He slipped from the saddle, knelt down, and pressed an ear against the earth.

He was startled by the result. He heard the sound of hoofs so plainly that he raised his head and looked to the eastward, certain of seeing several horsemen emerge from the gloom. But the darkness told him nothing; all was blank obscurity, as before.

"Strange!" he muttered, once more press-

ing his ear against the warm sand. He detected the hoof-beats, but they seemed not quite so sharp as before. It was as if the horsemen were riding from him. Still the sounds did not die out, and Bob rose to his feet.

A minute later he climbed into the saddle. He was impatient to return to camp, but prudence whispered that instead of doing so in a direct line, he should make a detour, so as to flank the strangers who threatened him. The location of the moon in the sky made him certain that he could keep his bearings, and turning Pedro around, he started him forward at a slow walk.

"It looks very much as if Apaches are more plentiful than is pleasant in these parts. It doesn't matter which way a fellow turns, he is liable to run into some of them. It wouldn't be so bad if I had my friends with me, but I don't care about going it alone. Hello, again!"

The young man was riding almost in a direct line southward, when his pony threw up his head and stopped without waiting for the pressure on his bit. That the subtle sense of the animal had made another dis-

quieting discovery was not to be doubted, and the alarming feature about it was that the quarter from which it came showed it was a new danger.

Bob thrust his head over the neck of his pony, but his keen vision detected nothing. Once more he slipped to the ground and appealed to his sense of hearing. Again he heard the dull thumping of hoofs, and the distance seemed the same as in the previous instance.

Bob did not wait before climbing into the saddle. Pedro showed an inclination to turn to the westward, or directly away from the mountain spur, but his rider held him still, until he could decide upon the best course to take.

"If we go north, we shall run into those fellows; if I turn south, I'll butt against the others; and I can't get back to camp without going to the eastward. The right thing to do is to make a wider circuit out on the plain, and then come back to the base of the spur."

He cast a look to the northern horizon, where the glare had first caught his notice. It had nearly died out. The raiders had completed their work there and were hurrying

off to strike elsewhere before the cavalry could check them.

"If they knew there was a lonely youngster groping his way over the country just now, I think they would make a hunt for him, and if they hunted, they wouldn't have much trouble in finding him."

With his senses keyed to the highest point, Bob held the pony to a slow walk, while both animal and rider used their eyes and ears to the utmost. As before, it was the quadruped that was the first to detect something suspicious. He was facing the west, opposite to the course he took in the first instance, when he slowed his pace, snuffed the air, and finally halted.

"Things are taking the queerest shape I ever knew; I've started toward three different points of the compass and each time have been stopped by a bunch of redskins. Now I wonder that since I found out where *they* were, they have not also found out something about me. An Apache on the warpath can be counted on to know his business a good deal better than a verdant youth from Pennsylvania."

Bob was debating whether to dismount and

apply his ear to the ground again, but hesitated, because it seemed needless. He did not doubt that he would hear the sound of hoofs, and the feeling came over him that it was advisable to stay in the saddle and be ready for whatever came.

In a line due westward the darkness gradually assumed shape, until the youth made out dimly but unmistakably the figure of a horse and rider. He could see the forms, but nothing of the face or makeup of either man or animal. Bob's natural supposition was that the horseman was slowly approaching him. He dropped the reins and held his Winchester ready for any emergency.

To his unbounded amazement, he became aware a minute or two later that the horse was not moving a muscle. Reaching the edge of the field of vision, the rider had brought him to a halt and held him there.

Watching and wondering, Bob heard the warrior emit a low, tremulous whistle like the call of a night bird. That it was a signal was proved by the reply which sounded precisely the same and came from a point behind the youth. He turned his head like a flash, and could he believe his eyes?

A second horseman loomed to view at the same distance, and the two exchanged signals over the head of the dumfounded youth. Not only that, but another whistle came from the north, and turning his gaze thither, Bob saw dimly, but as unmistakably as before, the form of a third pony and his rider. Thus, if he looked to the right or left or in front, he observed the same seeming apparition, though each was far from being such.

"I wonder how many more there are; of course there must be another."

Bob turned his head, and looked over his shoulder, but saw no more. The three were enough, and, in fact, considerably more than enough.

The truth flashed upon our friend: he had been discovered long before he saw the Apaches, and the whim had taken them to bear down upon their victim in this extraordinary manner.

"They have shut me in," muttered Bob, compressing his lips, "but I'm mightily mistaken if I don't make things lively for a little while."

CHAPTER XIX

THE PARTY OF PURSUIT

BRIEF as had been the experience of Bob Goodale in Southeastern Arizona, it will be admitted that it was of a stirring nature. Now, however, he felt that he was caught in the most serious dilemma of his life. Seated on his pony on the open plain, near the spur of the Santa Catalina mountains, he was surrounded by three horsemen, all equi-distant, who were on the alert to stop his flight in any direction. The instant he made a start, he would throw only one to the rear, while the other two could readily converge so as to head him off.

While he was confident that not one of the animals was fleeter of foot than his own Pedro, it was not necessary that the others should be faster. They would have a shorter distance to traverse in order to throw themselves across his line of flight, and a collision with all the Apaches was inevitable.

Bob glanced from one to the other. Each seemed as motionless as himself, and all were facing him. So far as he could judge, there was no choice in the course to take in making his break for freedom. The time was short in which he played the part of a statue, but not more than three or four minutes had passed when he made a terrifying discovery. Each horseman was becoming more distinct. With a precision that in the circumstances was marvelous, the three were slowly closing in upon him. They were edging forward, and he had but to remain motionless where he was for a short time, to find them all within striking distance. What scheme could be more remarkable, and what scheme could have been carried out with more amazing success?

The discovery that the human wall, as in the case of the ancient prisoner, was remorselessly creeping upon him, with the frightful end inevitable if he did nothing to help himself, roused Bob as he had never been roused before.

"If I wait till they are within a few paces, it will be all up; I must make a break before it is too late."

In a flash he resolved upon a desperate plan, which was the only one that offered the slightest hope. Instead of trying to dash between two of the Apaches, thereby placing himself at the mercy of both, he would charge straight at a single horseman. This would draw him the farthest distance possible from the other two, but it made certain a fight with one. He did not hesitate.

He glanced again at each in turn. There could be no error; all three were nearer than at any previous moment. The ponies, under the guidance of their riders, were stepping almost imperceptibly forward, and as steadily as the shadow on the face of the dial, edging toward the central figure.

Bob decided to charge upon the Apache on his right. That course would carry him toward his friends, whom he was eager to join, and thereby lessen the distance between him and them. The bucks would not be looking for anything of the kind, and he would gain a slight advantage by the suddenness of his action.

He held his Winchester in his left hand. He brought the nose of his pony around so as to face the warrior, and dropped the reins.

Drawing his revolver, he gripped it in his right hand.

"Now, Pedro, do your best! Run him down if you can, and show the others a clean pair of heels."

He intended to wait until within a few paces, and then let fly with two or three chambers of his weapon. With the interval so short, he was confident of disabling his enemy at least. By that time the others would plunge into the affray, and Bob would fling himself forward on the neck of his animal and trust to Providence and the fleetness of his peerless pony.

Suddenly a strange and alarming thing took place. The horseman whom he faced and whom he was about to charge, increased the pace of his animal and came forward at a rapid walk.

"I think, Bob, it's about time you stopped fooling!"

The words were spoken by the one whom the youth was on the point of charging, and he recognized the voice as that of his uncle!

At the same moment the other horsemen spurred their ponies into a faster gait and closed in upon the amazed youth. He heard

a chuckle behind him. It was Arizona Alf, who called out:

"Wal, tenderfoot, how do you like it?"

It was all clear now. The three men, returning to camp and finding the youth had left, set out to look for him. Calling into play all their woodcraft, and using the same means that Bob himself had employed, they finally located him, for at no time was he very far away, and fixed up the little scheme for teaching him a lesson. He could enjoy a joke even when it was at his expense, and he laughed as the four came together.

"You spoke just in time, Uncle," said Bob.

"Why?"

"I had completed my plans."

"What were they?"

"I was going to shoot you first, next Alf, and then Micah, but you saved yourselves."

"Now, wasn't that lucky for all of us?"

It was no time however, for jesting words, and the four quickly agreed upon the course they were to follow. Hiram Goodale explained:

"Micah has seen Geronimo and talked with him. We must act for a time from guesswork, but I may say the belief of Micah is that of Alf

and me. Wife and Minnie are not with Geronimo; by this time they are in the custody of Cochita, who is to be feared as much as the old reprobate, but there is this in our favor: that fellow is in love with your sister and will try to save her. He cannot well do that without saving my wife, and he cannot save the two without keeping them out of the reach of Geronimo. Both parties are camped for the night, or a part of the night, in the Santa Catalina mountains. We must locate Cochita, and what work is done, must be done between now and sun-up. Alf has figured out that the young chief is a few miles north of Geronimo, or it may be that the two camps are nearer each other; we are now going to hunt for Cochita and his captives."

Bob could not help asking:

"If he will act the part of a friend toward Minnie and her aunt, how can *we* give any help in this business?"

"It is hard to answer your question, but possibly Cochita may make conditions that will delay the sad end. It is on such delay that our hopes rest."

From what has been said, it will be seen that the cunning wisdom of Arizona Alf had come

startlingly near the truth of the situation. It was comparatively early in the night that the four horsemen, riding in Indian file, silently entered a well-marked trail among the narrow foothills of the Santa Catalina range. Arizona Alf was at the head, for he was not only the most skilful woodsman of the party, but was upon familiar ground. He had followed the cattle into these parts, and once had a brush with a marauding party of Apaches, in which he was twice wounded. Next to him walked the pony of Hiram Goodale; then came Bob, while Long Micah brought up the rear. The leader had fixed in his mind the spot where Cochita was likely to make an indefinite halt. It was speculation on his part, but when a frontiersman engages upon such work as occupies all his skill and energies, such, in a large measure, must be his method.

It was not necessary for the leader to impress upon his companions the necessity of absolute silence. Not a word was spoken, and, had it been possible, the hoofs of the ponies would have been muffled. It seemed as if the intelligent animals had an idea of what was required of them; for their steps

could not have been lighter, though now and then the iron shoes gave out a slight sound which caused the riders to wince with misgiving.

Enormous rocks and boulders, looking black and grim in the night, rose on every hand. Between them the trail wound, steadily ascending, though often at a moderate grade. It looked at times as if the path must end abruptly, and the horsemen find themselves face to face with an insurmountable wall; but in each instance the leader turned the head of his pony to one side and pushed on without pause. Sometimes his sinewy figure was hardly visible in the gloom, and then it loomed clear and distinct where the moonlight fell upon it.

The trail which they were following had a width varying from two or three yards to ten times that extent. It suggested an ancient cañon that had been washed out in the remote past by some mountain stream. Before starting over this mountain trail, Alf had said he expected to follow it for perhaps a mile. Beyond that it would be impossible to go with the animals, and they would have to abandon them and push on afoot.

For a half mile the procession wound its way up the rocky trail like so many phantoms. Not a word was spoken even in a whisper. There was no call for speech, and the instructions of the leader were followed in spirit and letter. The stillness was profound. At times there seemed to be a faint, deep murmur in the air, like the distant moaning of the ocean; but it was the voice of silence that had brooded for centuries among the mountains and foothills. The time, the scene, and the surroundings could not have been more impressive.

Suddenly the ranchman saw Alf stop. He did the same, and the two behind imitated him. Arizona Alf raised his hand as a warning that no one should speak. All obeyed and listened intently. Neither the ranchman nor his nephew could hear anything except the low, hollow murmur that had been in their ears from the beginning, but something must have been noted by Micah, for he forced his pony forward beside the leader. The width of the trail allowed the four to edge nearer together.

Without speaking, Micah slipped from his saddle. Alf did the same, and again raised

his hand as a command for silence. It was evident that the two most experienced members of the little party were listening. The Goodales did the same, but still neither was able to note anything different from before. Amid the tense silence, Alf suddenly whispered:

“There’s somebody ahead of us on the trail!”

CHAPTER XX

A MEETING IN THE GORGE

GROUPED so closely together, it was safe to speak in whispers.

"You heard him, Micah?" was the inquiring remark of Arizona Alf to his comrade.

"I did; I wondered you didn't stop before."

"I thought it best to make this point first. The rest of you will wait here while I look after that fellow ahead of us."

Before he could move away, Micah interposed.

"It won't do, Alf."

"Why not?"

"You know the trail and the rest of us don't. If you should pass in your checks, it will be all up with the rest of us, but it won't make any difference in *my* case."

Arizona Alf saw the force of the logic.

"All right; I'll leave him to you; I think there's only one of 'em."

Without another word, Long Micah moved up the ravine on foot, with no more noise than the creeping shadow among the rocks and boulders that walled them in. Needless to say, he carried his Winchester, revolver, and knife.

Ten minutes after his departure, Arizona Alf said in the same guarded undertone:

"You two will stay where you are."

"What are you going to do?" asked the ranchman.

"Move ahead a little."

The couple who were left supposed Alf wished to gain a position where he could learn something additional. His real reason, however, was that he might give aid to his comrade, should it become necessary; and something told him that such aid was likely to be called for.

Meanwhile, Long Micah gave all his skill to the perilous task he had undertaken. He knew as well as if he had plainly seen him, that one of the Apache scouts was in the gorge a short distance in advance, and that his presence was not accidental. He had been placed there either by Geronimo or Cochita; for it was incredible that the dusky raiders would fail

to take every precaution, when they knew the United States cavalrymen were hot on their trail. The Apache leaders may have felt no fear of the four horsemen that were in their neighborhood, but they were aware that the apparently secret passage in the mountains was known to more than one trooper, and that some of those horsemen were the equals of themselves in woodcraft.

Arizona Alf, as he had already done in the course of the evening, guided his route by a theory of his own. In the performance of his duty, the Apache scout had gone some distance down the trail, and thus discovered the approach of the horsemen despite the extreme care they used. Instead of hurrying back with the tidings, he stealthily withdrew before the advance of his enemies, until no doubt longer remained that they were heading for the party encamped in the neighborhood. It was possible, however, that the white men had a different purpose in view, and would turn into one of the cross-ravines, and thus leave the sentinel to continue his watch for the benefit of his own particular friends.

Another fact was certain: the Apache would find out that the horsemen had halted,

though it was not likely that he would suppose it was because of his presence. Nevertheless, the buck was sure to stop also, and wait till the meaning of the pause appeared; but, while keeping a safe distance ahead, that distance would naturally increase before he learned that the horsemen had ceased their advance.

Acting upon this theory, Long Micah had not gone more than a hundred paces up the ravine, when he stopped at a sharp bend and awaited the return of the Apache. His intention was to take him on the fly, as may be said.

The situation was tense to the last degree. He knew he had pitted himself against a master of woodcraft, and the slightest carelessness on his own part was sure to be fatal. He must take no chances that could be avoided.

The cowboy leaned his Winchester against a rock and placed his hand on the butt of his revolver. This was done to assure himself that it was in place. Neither of the firearms was the weapon which he relied upon in the impending encounter. The fight must be carried on without noise, for there was no

knowing how near they were to the camp of the hostiles or to other Apache scouts.

It was as if the cowboy was stamped against the rock at his rear, whose narrow shadow inclosed him. He was relying wholly upon his hearing, for he did not dare step forward or thrust out his head. He grasped his knife and silently waited.

You will understand the importance of the task undertaken by the white man. It would not do to allow the scout to return to his camp, bearing the tidings that four horsemen were stealing upon them. If that were done, there was not one chance in a million of accomplishing anything. All the probabilities pointed to the annihilation of the whites themselves.

Fifteen minutes passed in stillness like that of the tomb. Men of Micah's calling learn the value of patience; and though the time seemed longer than it was, he did not allow it to betray him into the first incautious movement.

Sh! Was it the sound of a falling leaf, coming from a point in front? Nine persons in ten would have believed so, but Micah did not doubt for a moment that it was caused by

his Apache enemy, who, having missed the horsemen that had followed him so long, was returning to learn the cause of the lagging. The cowboy gripped his knife more firmly, compressed his lips, and braced himself for the shock that he was certain would come within the next minute or two.

But the minutes wore on and the sound was not repeated. It must have been that the buck was stealing upon the white man with a skill that defied the keenest hearing. Such a feat had been accomplished many a time by his race, and why should it not be repeated in the present circumstances? It might be that the wonderful intuition of the Apache had whispered something to him, and, instead of advancing, he also had paused and was waiting for his enemy to betray himself through some inadvertence.

Enough has been told to show the skill of Long Micah; and yet, astounding as it may seem, it is none the less a fact that in pitting himself against the dusky scout, he combatted a foe who succeeded in outwitting him. This Apache had observed the stoppage of the horsemen sooner than they supposed. His halt was nearer the white men than even Ari-

zona Alf suspected. Whether he would have walked into the trap set for him, as did his comrade, is uncertain. I am inclined to think he would not have done so.

Thus it came about that when Long Micah was sure the Apache was farther up the ravine than himself, and approaching from the front, he was actually at the rear of the white man, who did not dream of the startling fact. The almost imperceptible noise which he heard was the soft impact of the buck's moccasin, but it was so faint that Micah had no thought that it came from a point behind him. All his attention therefore was fixed upon the front, where he was confident his enemy would appear within a few seconds.

A form like that of a crouching panther moved through the gloom until at the right point, when, with the same absence of noise, it straightened up, and with a single bound, shot forward and came down upon the shoulders of the white man, bearing him as helplessly to the earth as if under an avalanche.

In the same instant that the cowboy felt the crushing weight, he knew the woeful mistake he had made. He had been outwitted, but the end was not yet. He was powerful, active,

and skilled in wrestling. As he sank downward, he threw up his hand and seized the wrist of his enemy with a vise-like grip. He had aimed to grasp the right wrist, but in the flurry and desperate haste he miscalculated and gripped the left one, but by a remarkable coincidence the Apache was left-handed and he therefore held his knife in that hand. Instantly seeing his disadvantage, the buck strove to shift the weapon to the other hand, for at such close quarters he could use it thus with deadly effect.

The cowman was prompt to note the purpose of his enemy, and strove with the utmost desperation to prevent success in the effort. In the shock of the encounter, Micah had dropped his own weapon and could not recover it, for it was invisible in the gloom and his hands were too busily engaged to turn them to other use had the chance offered.

But the white man had his revolver at his hip, and strove to draw it, only to perceive, after a fierce attempt, that it was impossible to do so. The utmost he could do was to prevent the buck from using his knife, and there was no saying how long the cowman would be able to do even that. Truth to tell,



HE SEIZED THE WRIST OF HIS ENEMY.

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the Apache was of exceptional power and activity, and it took Micah but a very few minutes to learn that he could not master him; nor could he even save his life without assistance. He might bring one or more of his friends to the spot by shouting, but the proud fellow would die before doing that.

The poor man must have succumbed in a brief while but for the arrival of Arizona Alf. It will be remembered that he had left the Goodales, impelled by the belief that some emergency like the present would call for him. He had heard the scuffling, which told him the truth, and he was on the spot in a twinkling. No more need be said.

CHAPTER XXI

THE CAMP-FIRE

CLOSE to the place where the four men had halted their ponies and dismounted was a gorge of nearly the same width that opened out to the right. Arizona Alf remembered it well. It extended but a short distance and was in the nature of a pocket.

"We'll lead the animals in there and leave 'em till we need 'em," he explained. "Don't forget, we're mighty close to the Apache camp, and a little slip will upset everything."

He took the lead, as before, holding the bridle of his animal, and stepping with the utmost caution, those who followed showing the same extreme care. The distance was only a few rods, and the veteran leader was certain they had not been observed. Then the four made their way back to the ravine, where they paused for their final discussion.

"We're close to the camp, as I observed

before," said Alf, "a good deal closer than I thought, but the situation is mighty onsartin."

"In what respect?" asked the ranchman.

"I don't know whether it's the camp of Geronimo or Cochita."

The others were surprised. Goodale said:

"It is only a little while ago that Micah left Geronimo's camp, two or three miles distant in the mountains."

"I haven't forgot that, but there ain't anybody living that can make a quicker change of base than he."

"Why should he do so in this instance?"

"He hates Cochita as bad as he hates us; he knows that the younger one is trying to save some of our people, and it may be he has gone to Cochita's camp to take a hand in the business. We've got to larn things for ourselves."

"How shall we do it?"

"I thought Micah and me would work together, but each of us must do what he can on his own hook. I think that you, Hiram, and the youngster, are more likely to spoil the game if you try your hands, but I know how hard it is to stay idle when others need

your help. So I've no objection to your doing what you choose."

This concession on the part of the leader astonished the others. It struck them as specially imprudent to leave Bob free to follow his whims. But the men reflected that he would do this, no matter whether forbidden or not, and therefore there was little or no choice in the matter.

Something more definite was needed in the plan of campaign. Their leader told the others that whoever picked up any knowledge of importance was to return to the rendezvous at the head of the side gorge, and await the rest. This was vague, for it might be that such discovery would call for prompt action; but it was all that could be done.

Within the following five minutes, Alf and Micah passed up the ravine and disappeared from sight. They had hardly done so when they also separated, it being agreed that Alf should work round to the northern side of the camp, while Micah pushed on from the south. The veterans kept things moving.

"Earlier in the evening we left you alone," remarked the ranchman to his nephew; "now I am your companion. Alf was good

enough to give us permission to try anything we chose, but I see little prospect of any success."

"From what Alf said, the Apache sentinel discovered the approach of Micah, though he paid dearly for the knowledge. I have learned enough to be careful, and you always knew the importance of being so. Suppose I steal round to the left of where the Apache camp is supposed to be?"

"I know of nothing better, but it is well to remember, Bob, that neither of us is to attempt anything on his own account; that is for Alf and Micah."

This was all the program that could be arranged, and the two moved up the ravine a few minutes after their friends, and, like them, quickly parted company. Thus the four were working independently, but along the same lines, with comparatively slight space separating them from one another.

A peculiar problem faced them. Geronimo and Cochita were leading separate detachments of the raiders that had broken out of the San Carlos Reservation. The younger man had fewer bucks under his command than the elder, and when these came together,

there would be no questioning the authority of Geronimo. Cochita was as ambitious as he, and, although the two parties were sure to unite if hard pressed, or should cross the Rio Grande into Mexico, Cochita would delay such junction as long as he could. This was more assured than before, since the younger had taken a couple of women in his charge.

Had the raiders united? That was the important question. It would be supposed that since Geronimo was seen earlier in the evening at a somewhat distant point, he was still there, or in the vicinity, but there was no saying what his hatred of the white race and jealousy of his rival would lead him to do. In case of such action, he would first hide his women and children in the recesses of the mountains, so as to leave him and his bucks free to act as they chose. When the chances of a fight with white cavalry were so good, the wily chief did not mean to be handicapped by the care of his helpless ones. Geronimo proved early in his career that with all his treachery, he was not always lacking in courage and was not averse to a brush now and then with United States troopers.

Arizona Alf again displayed his matchless

woodcraft in working his way around and beyond the camp of hostiles. Comfort called for no fire, but where there were only bucks and the camp was closely guarded, it was probable the scout would find one. With cattle so plentiful and the chances for cooking so good, they were likely to broil the steaks, though it was no hardship to eat them raw and without any preparation at all.

So carefully did the cowman flank the spot where he was confident the camp had been established for the time, that he had turned and was working his way back before he caught the glimmer of a light which told him he was near the point he was seeking. The boulders and stunted pines gave all he could ask in the nature of a screen, for the shadows were so plentiful that the moonlight never exposed him to discovery.

Along the warm, jagged side of an immense rock he stole, then between other boulders; and when a safe point was reached, he lay flat on his face, and with endless patience, crept slowly and with frequent halts over the broad, flat surface of some obstruction which obtruded itself and did not permit any flanking movement. He could not forget the

blunder made by Long Micah, and he did not mean to repeat it.

Advancing in this cat-like fashion, the scout finally reached a point from which he had a view of the camp. A disappointment awaited him. A fire of pine boughs and crackling sticks had been kindled against the base of a rock, in such position that unless by accidental discovery, it could not be seen three or four rods away. With the sentinels on guard, the vigilant Apaches were warranted in believing they were safe against detection by any of the troopers, who in all probability were searching for them at that very moment.

Lolling about this small fire were five bucks. The remains of a calf that could not have been a maverick showed they had been feasting, and all were now lazily smoking their short clay or brierwood pipes. One of the party sat near the blaze, with his back against the rock. Despite the warmth of the situation, a blanket enfolded his shoulders, his moccasins were drawn up so that his arms rested on the knees, and he seemed to be gazing into vacancy, as if lost in reverie. As the light fell upon his square, hard countenance, Ari-

zona Alf recognized him as Geronimo, chief of the Warm Spring band of Apaches.

The cowboy knew him well, and we remember that the two had met earlier in the evening, when, but for his cunning and woodcraft, the white man never would have rejoined his friends.

The disappointment of Arizona Alf lay in the fact that he had come upon Geronimo instead of Cochita, who he believed held the women in his keeping. Not only had the two bands of hostiles failed to unite, but the scout lacked the means of knowing the location of the other company. It might be within a brief distance, or it might be miles away. No doubt the ponies were tethered near, and in case of alarm the owners could flee to them in a twinkling.

The thought that instantly came to Arizona Alf, as he looked upon the singular scene, was:

"How easily I could pick off Geronimo, and what a good thing it would be for Arizona and New Mexico! It would save the army a good deal of trouble and rid the border of the worst scourge it has ever had."

It may as well be admitted that it was no feeling of compunction over the deed that

stayed the hand of the old campaigner. He and his comrades were in that dangerous section for a far different purpose, and the abrupt taking off of the Apache leader would have brought their plans to a summary end and closed every hope of the rescue of the hapless captives.

Suddenly the chief roused himself from his reverie and turned his face toward the spot where the white man was crouching. He held his pipe in the fingers of his right hand, which was alongside his coppery countenance.

The action was so unexpected that Alf was startled, thinking his presence had been detected; but the next moment told him that was impossible, since he had not stirred a muscle for some time, and no one could have heard his gentle breathing. The next act of the chief was more alarming. He rose to his feet, knocked the ashes from his pipe, which he shoved into the pocket of his dilapidated trousers, drew his Winchester from where it was leaning against the rock beside him, and saying something to the bucks lolling on the ground, turned and strode off in the gloom.

In doing so, he moved directly toward the

spot where Arizona Alf lay, with his eyes centered upon him.

"By George, old fellow!" thought the white man, "it's you or me, and I don't think it's going to be me!"

But the thought was hardly formed, when the chief turned to the right and passed the scout without suspecting the fact. The latter could hear no sound caused by the moccasined feet, for Geronimo was a master of woodcraft, and never forgot his caution.

Where was he going? Alf believed he was on his way to Cochita, who was somewhere in the neighborhood. If such were the fact, it would seem that all the white man had to do was to dog the footsteps of the chief and learn what he had been trying for hours to learn; but the scout did not make any attempt to do this, for the very good reason that success was impossible. One man may shadow another in a civilized community, where disguises and all sorts of helps are at his command, but in such circumstances as I have pointed out, it is beyond the attainment of any human being.

To keep the chief in sight, Alf would have had to proceed as fast as he. He would be obliged continually to expose himself in the

moonlight, and with all the skill at his command he could not help making a slight noise with his feet. On the alert as Geronimo always was, he would have discovered his danger on the very first slip by his pursuer.

Thus, for very good reasons, Arizona Alf allowed the terrible Apache to pass out of sight without any attempt to follow him.

CHAPTER XXII

ON THE BASIN'S EDGE

THE time had come again when Arizona Alf was forced to proceed on what may be termed general principles. Without any real knowledge of where to look for Cochita and his prisoners, he was able to make a fair guess, for you will remember that he was intimately familiar with a good deal of the Santa Catalina range.

Geronimo had been out of sight only a few minutes, when the scout decided upon the point to visit. But before doing so it was necessary to rejoin his friends and to tell them of his change of policy. He was uneasy, for he knew that none was so well fitted as he to make search, and had his skill been less he would have been baffled and must have revealed to the Apaches the presence of enemies in their neighborhood. The worst results were to be expected if any of them, including Long Micah, attempted to do what he had done.

With vast relief he found the three when he returned to the rendezvous in the gorge. Each had been out on a venture of his own, which it is not necessary to describe. Micah had located Geronimo's camp, but not with such certainty as the other veteran. Hiram Goodale and his nephew were sensible enough to comprehend the difficulties and came back, wisely leaving the others to attend to the delicate duty.

When the four had exchanged experiences, Alf explained that with the welfare of the captives in mind Cochita had most likely gone to a basin or depression in the mountains where there were both water and grass for their ponies.

"We'll make for that," said he; "it is not far. We have had to be mighty careful up to this time, but now we've got to be ten times carefuller than ever. I'll take the lead, and you will keep far enough back to get a chance to scoot if I give the word."

Leaving their ponies where they had been placed some time before, the little party set out in the order followed when entering the wild region over the trail. In this manner they climbed for some two hundred yards, as

noiselessly as so many Indian scouts stealing into an enemy's camp. Alf paused until his companions joined him.

"Here you'll wait till I come back; we are so close that we must know what is in front before going farther."

"Are we near Cochita's camp?" asked the ranchman.

"I can only say I think we are; he may be miles away, but I have a feeling that it's as I said; we can't strike till I get my bearings."

This fact was so apparent that no one could question it. The guide was assured that on his return he would find them awaiting him.

"Unless," said Bob, "you get into trouble and need us."

"Wait till I call out your name, younker; if I make a signal, it will be for Micah; true, he doesn't know more than the law allows, but you and Hiram don't know even that much."

It sounded odd to Bob to hear an employe thus refer to his employer, but the words were not only warranted, but their manner of utterance shut out all offense. No one was quicker than Hiram Goodale to recognize the immeasurable superiority of the cowboy in such circumstances as the present.

The three were in the shadow cast by the surrounding rocks and stunted vegetation. It would seem that they had nothing to fear from Apache sentinels, though there could never be warrant for any forgetfulness or carelessness when in the country of the hostiles. The ranchman and his nephew sat down on the ground, but Micah kept his feet. He walked a few paces forward, as if by doing so his opportunity for seeing and hearing was better than if he remained in the company of the uncle and nephew. The latter felt it safe to whisper to each other, for the words were so guarded that even the cowboy a few feet distant could hardly hear them.

"It doesn't sound romantic, uncle," said Bob, "but it seems to me I was never so hungry in my life."

"I feel the same; Alf and Micah must be as ravenous, though neither would speak of it for a day or two, so long as there's no chance to get food."

"We have been without it for a long time, and I don't think it will harm us to wait till to-morrow."

"We may as well make up our minds to that, for there isn't an earthly chance of getting a

mouthful before then, and perhaps not until long after. If we ever do get through with this business—that is, successfully—I shall double the wages of Alf and Micah.”

“We can’t do too much for them, especially for Alf. I shudder when I think of what may happen. How would father feel if he knew of Minnie to-night? She and Auntie left home in the highest spirits, and had hardly set foot in Arizona when they landed right among a raiding party of Apaches. How strange that their visit was so timed that we could give them no warning! A day sooner and they would have been at the ranch; a day later and the danger would have been known at Raymond, and poor Jud Staples never would have started with his stage.”

“We can only pray and do our best; wife and I have been talking for years about pulling up stakes and getting out of this accursed country.”

“And will keep on talking for years longer,” replied Bob; “you will spend your days in Arizona, for you have become so accustomed to it you will never be contented elsewhere. You hardly arrive at our home before you are anxious to get back to the ranch. Auntie

would have stayed longer with father had she not become homesick."

"I guess you are right," said the ranchman, with a mirthless laugh; "the people who live at the foot of Mount Vesuvius can't be hired to move, though there's no saying when the volcano will overwhelm them. A city might be destroyed every spring by an earthquake, and it would be rebuilt and occupied between the calamities. What's become of Micah?"

Bob turned his head and looked in the direction where their friend was standing like a statue a few minutes previous. He was not in sight.

"He may have grown anxious about Alf, and set out to learn whether his help is needed."

"If Alf runs into any trap, not even Micah can help him; our friend may have shifted his position for only a few paces. I'll see."

The ranchman walked silently to the place among the rocks where the cowman had stationed himself. As Goodale did so he found his supposition was correct. At a slight turn in the narrow gorge he saw Micah, still on his feet, motionless and listening. Hearing the slight noise made by the approach

he turned his head, and came to the side of his employer, who asked:

"Have you seen or heard anything suspicious?"

"Ain't sartin; I thought I heerd a low whistle, but I ain't sure."

"Suppose it had been a whistle, what would it have meant?"

"If it was repeated twice, it would have been a call from Alf for me to go to him; but there's the trouble; I'm not sure he whistled more than once."

"Suppose it *was* only once?"

"It would have told me to look out and stay where I am till I was called to agin."

"It seems to me that if Alf wished you to join him, and you waited a minute or two, he would repeat his call."

"That's what he would have done, and that's why I'm waiting for something further. Listen!"

The two did so, but the only sounds that reached them through the profound stillness were the soft murmuring of the night wind among the dwarf pines, and the hollow murmur which I have noted as belonging to all solitudes.

Suddenly the listeners were startled by the report of a gun. It was all of a half mile distant, however, and in no way threatened them. None the less it gave ground for disturbing fancies and fears. Who had fired the gun? Was it an Apache or a cowboy, or one of the troopers that had penetrated into the mountains? What effect would the incident have upon the band whom our friends were trying to locate, and whom they believed they had located? But the minutes wore on, and no further signal was heard from Arizona Alf, nor did he rejoin his friends, who were anxiously awaiting his return.

It need not be said that the veteran made the best use of his time. When beyond sight of his companions he paused among the rocks to assure himself as to where he was. He was quick to recognize his surroundings, for though it was a long time since he had visited this particular locality, he recalled every feature of it.

Peering around in the patches of moonlight, he knew he had but to make his way over a sort of ridge directly in front, to reach the edge of the cup-like depression in which he believed Cochita had halted with his captives.

The dull glow of a light, which appeared a few minutes later, showed he had made no mistake. Here in the little basin crossed by a small stream of water, there was not only abundant grass but a good many pine trees, which fringed the rivulet. It was among these that the light of a camp fire twinkled.

With characteristic stealth and skill, Arizona Alf picked his way down into the hollow, taking advantage of everything that could give him protection, and never allowing his impatience unduly to hasten his footsteps. It required time and labor to reach a point which gave him a clear view of the camp.

There was the pile of branches, boughs, and sticks burning dimly, as if the fire had not been disturbed for a good while. Large stones had been rolled into place to serve as seats; there were the remains of the cooked portions of a steer; and the ground had been trampled by feet, showing that a considerable company of Apaches had halted at this place.

But not a person or pony was visible. All had vanished as if they had never been.

Suspecting the truth, Arizona Alf was too prudent to take anything for granted. With the same painstaking deliberation as before,

he made a complete circuit of the camp, and when he came back to his starting point, all doubt was removed. Something had alarmed the raiders and they had skurried deeper into the mountains for security.

“Being as they have left some vittles behind, there’s no need of them going to waste,” mused Arizona Alf, who, rejoining his friends, guided them to the spot, where the four satisfied the pangs of hunger from the feast that had been prepared for others.

CHAPTER XXIII

CAPTOR AND CAPTIVES

WE have neglected too long the fortunes of Mrs. Goodale and her niece, whom we left under the escort of Cochita and two Apache bucks, as they wended their way across the plain toward the spur of the Santa Catalina range. The dusky youth who had risen from barbarism to civilization, and then reverted to savagery again, was so infatuated with Minnie Goodale that he was ready to become civilized once more, if thereby he could win her for himself. Young as was the sister of Bob Goodale she was old enough to perceive this fact from the first. Indeed, it will be recalled that Cochita had shown a marked preference for her when he was at school in the East. He would have pressed his suit had she not firmly though kindly repulsed him. He submitted because nothing else remained to be done. But what a change of circumstances! How

strange the series of incidents that had thrown such an immeasurable advantage into his hands!

It was impossible that he should know of Minnie Goodale's intended visit to the ranch of her uncle. The manner in which Cochita had become involved with her was one of those coincidences which occur oftener in this life than is generally supposed. She had fallen into his power temporarily, and he was resolutely determined to improve the golden opportunity to the utmost. He could conceive of no sacrifice he would not make, nor of any price he would not pay to secure the prize which to him was beyond value.

You have been told enough about Cochita to understand that he was a remarkable youth. He was too wise to allow his ardent affection to run away with his sense. He saw a chance of saving the young lady from the doom that impended over every one who fell into the hands of the unspeakable Apaches. The fate of the elder was wrapped up in the younger, but if he could save one he could save both, and he was quite ready to do that if the reward were secured to him.

None knew better than he that the most

formidable obstacle in the path of his success was Geronimo. He would show no mercy to any man, woman, or child who belonged to the Caucasian race. He was especially eager to defeat any scheme that Cochita had in view pointing in that direction, for he hated the youth with a consuming hatred, and welcomed the chance not only of baffling him but of turning the incident itself against his rival. The brilliant Cochita was growing in popularity, and, unless nipped in the bud, promised to overshadow him. It looked as if the golden opportunity for which the grim wretch aspired had come to him, but it required careful and skilful handling.

And there can be no question that Cochita handled it with rare skill. He offered to take Mrs. Goodale on the pony in front of him, leaving the niece to the care of one of the other bucks. When the women declined, Cochita did not repeat the invitation, but slipping to the ground walked all the way to the foothills. In doing this he kept a slight distance in advance so as to allow the two to converse freely. They improved the opportunity.

"If deception was ever justifiable," said the elder, "it is in your case."

"I do not question that," was the quiet reply.

"Then why not make the deception complete? Why feel any compunction in giving Cochita the pledge which he means to ask of you?"

"You and many others will think me foolish, but, Aunty, I will not tell a falsehood to save our lives. I should rather save yours than my own, but if I make any promise to Cochita, no matter what it is, I shall keep it in spirit and letter."

"Do you look upon a promise made under duress as binding?"

"I answer unhesitatingly *yes*."

"What then do you mean to do?"

"If he asks me the question you feel so sure he intends to ask, all I can do is to try to put him off. That is my only recourse."

"He will insist upon an immediate answer."

"He shall have it."

"And you regard a promise made in such circumstances as binding?"

"I do; my word shall be sacredly kept; I value it higher than life itself."

Cochita, as I have said, walked a few paces in advance. But he was sharp-eared and he

overheard everything that passed between the captives. He knew now beyond cavil, that all he had to do was to wrest the pledge he craved from the young woman. No matter what followed, she would keep it, if her life were spared to do so. He instantly decided upon his line of policy: he would wring the promise from Minnie, and then, at every possible risk, restore her to her friends, leaving the fulfillment of the pledge to the future.

To do this, there was no escaping a collision with Geronimo, but Cochita did not shrink from it, though the consequences were sure to be of the gravest nature. He hoped to outwit the grim leader by cunning, leaving open defiance as the last resort.

Familiar with the recesses of the wild region which he now entered, Cochita led the procession over an easily traveled trail into the mountains, two of his bucks dropping to the rear to watch for pursuers, including Geronimo and his band, who, it may be said, were more dreaded by the younger leader than the ranchmen or troopers. Frequent pauses were made, and Cochita continually inquired as to the wishes of the captives, whom he treated as if they were honored

guests. Not until dusk was stealing through the mountains was a permanent halt made.

The spot selected was that which some time later was approached by Arizona Alf and his friends, where they saw not Cochita but Geronimo and several of his bucks. Cochita intended to remain where they had paused until morning, provided the Warm Spring chief did not interfere. The ponies were left to themselves in a small, pocket-like ravine, where there was neither water nor grass. The animals needed both, but an Apache acts on the theory that his horse should become as accustomed as himself to hunger and thirst.

The surroundings were so dismal that Cochita busied himself with gathering limbs and sticks with which to start a fire. He had already sent one of his men in quest of food; for in a country where cattle are numbered by the hundred thousand no one need ever go hungry, if he is not too conscientious about branded animals, and does not confine himself to mavericks, which, as you may know, are tramp cattle, whose ownership has not been settled.

Minnie was standing somewhat apart with

her aunt, while their escort was occupied in kindling a fire. Suddenly she gripped Mrs. Goodale's arm.

"I believe we can slip back among the rocks behind us and hide until we have a chance to escape."

The elder caught the contagion.

"I'm willing to try, but I don't believe he will give us the chance."

They glanced at Cochita. He was more than a rod distant, and the surrounding darkness was deepening. The young chief seemed to be wholly occupied with the incipient blaze. He was on his knees in front of the rock against which he had placed the fuel. He had learned the convenience of the lucifer match in the East, and, drawing a small rubber safe from his pocket, he scratched the bit of wood along the corrugated bottom of the box and shaded the tiny blaze with his enclosing hands, as he leaned farther over to apply it to the leaves and dry twigs.

"Now," whispered Mrs. Goodale to her niece, grasping the hand of the latter; "we mustn't wait another second."

They noiselessly faced the gloom of the mountains behind them and moved away like

a couple of shadows. Their hearts were beating painfully with hope, but they had not taken a half dozen paces when both stopped abruptly. Something stirred in front of them, and in the obscurity an approaching Apache assumed form. He seemed not to notice them, but there could be no question as to how he came to be in that precise spot at such an inopportune moment for the captives.

"What folly for us to think Cochita would give us the slightest opportunity!" said the disappointed aunt; "that man has been there all the time."

Hiding their feelings as best they could, the women walked calmly to where Cochita, having set the fire going, had risen to his feet and was watching its progress.

"It isn't needed for warmth," he said pleasantly, "but it makes things cheerful and will help to prepare your evening meal."

"You are very thoughtful," said Mrs. Goodale, feeling that her words were true in every sense; "we are not hungry, but food and water are welcome."

"You shall not be kept waiting, for both are easily procured."

The captives seated themselves on a boulder

within the circle of light, while Cochita stood near, respectfully dividing his attention between them and the fire, which he carefully nursed into a vigorous blaze. The illumination spread over an area of twenty or thirty feet. The young chief was about to seat himself near the two, when he stopped, turned his head with a flitting movement like a startled bird, and looked off in the gloom. His action and pose showed that he had heard something, though neither of the others had caught so much as the rustle of a leaf. He stood thus for two or three minutes, when from the direction he was looking a muscular warrior walked into the circle of light. He bore the forequarters of a yearling which had been dressed and prepared for the fire. Evidently the instructions from his leader had been obeyed.

With his keen knife Cochita cut off several thin slices of the juicy steak, which he skewered on long, green sticks that were held over the flame and managed so deftly that they were browned to a turn.

While thus engaged a second Apache came out of the night, bearing a tin vessel of cool, clear water. It was a puzzle, to the prisoners

where he had gotten the utensil, though when it is remembered that these bucks were members of one of the most fearful bands that ever raided the Southwest, the question ought not to have been difficult of answer.

The meal being ready, Cochita brought forward the steak delicately arranged on pine twigs, apologizing for the crudeness of the accommodation and the fact that he had no knives or forks to offer them. Perforce, their fingers served as substitutes and their handkerchiefs answered for napkins. So they ate and drank and were refreshed.

CHAPTER XXIV

AN ABORIGINAL WOOING

DESPITE Cochita's remarkable self-command, the aunt and niece saw he was nervous over something. He waited until they were through with their meal, when he forced himself to partake of a small portion, for which it was plain he did not care. Mrs. Goodale believed the fellow was disturbed on account of his personal relations to Minnie and his resolution to bring matters to a crisis. She would have urged her niece to deceive him to the limit had she not known that it was useless to argue or plead with the girl. Nothing could dissuade the younger from obeying her conscience, even in a question of life and death. Had the aunt known that Cochita had overheard the conversation between the two, she would have suspected the truth: Geronimo had become a factor in the delicate business, and there could be no certainty as to how it all would end.

When a half hour had passed without any alarm from the outlying scouts, the uneasiness of the young leader subsided. He began to hope he would have no visitors until the morrow, and before that time he meant to clinch matters with the young woman whom a strange fate had placed in his hands. Such being his decision, he sauntered to where Minnie Goodale was sitting with her aunt and smilingly placed himself nearer the younger. The two instinctively felt that the crisis had come.

"I hope," he said in a voice which he knew how to modulate, "that before this time to-morrow you will be safe with your friends."

"That is my prayer, Cochita," replied the younger; "and how shall we ever repay you for your kindness? But for you we should have lost our lives long ago."

"I claim no credit, but I believe what you say is true; more than that, the greatest danger of all is still before us."

"Can any danger be too great for *you* to overcome?" asked Minnie, with engaging frankness.

The aunt could hardly restrain her impa-

tience, but she resolutely held her lips sealed, leaving her niece to speak for both.

The words of the latter seemed to fire the heart of the dusky wooer, who half rose from his reclining posture and, fixing his black eyes upon her, said in a low voice:

"It depends not upon *me*, but upon *you*."

Dreading what was coming, the young woman could think of naught to say except:

"I do not understand you."

"You invite me to make my meaning clear; I shall do so. - Geronimo is the head of the Warm Spring band, of which I am an humble member; his authority is above mine, as has been proved by his taking most of the men on this raid, despite all I could do to dissuade them; some look upon me as his rival; I may be so some day, but not yet; I cannot gainsay him."

Minnie knew the falsity of most of these words, but she could not contradict the man who held her life in the palm of his hand.

"I know his hatred of my race, but I am sure he will find Cochita a lion in his path."

"I need not assure you that I shall do all in my power for you and your aunt, but if

Geronimo comes to this camp with some of his men and declares that you both shall die, what shall I say in reply?"

"Do you expect me to give you instructions? I know of nothing that you can say, but there are many things you can *do*."

"Name them."

"Again you are asking for instructions; I shall suggest one thing: take myself and aunt from this place and part of the way to our home; we shall be glad to go the remainder of the way unattended."

"Happy indeed should I be to do as you ask, but within a hundred yards of this spot we should all be made prisoners either by Geronimo and his men, or by another party who would take us to him."

"How can you know that?"

"My scouts have kept me informed; I am expecting the chief every minute."

And he looked around as if to verify his words by his manner.

"Is there no way of saving us from his vengeance?"

"There is one way."

"Tell me."

"If I say to him that you are my promised

wife, he will not dare lay his finger on either of you.’’

Minnie was prepared for this declaration, but pretended she was not. She covered her face with her hands, as if overcome by emotion. Had the two been alone, the aboriginal wooer doubtless would have tried to imprison one of those dainty hands, but in the near background sat the aunt, silent, grim, and alert. The young chief would have been glad to put her beyond the power of interfering, had it been prudent to do so.

Having spoken the momentous words, no criticism could have been made upon the action of Cochita for the next few minutes. He remained silent, waiting for the young woman to regain control of her feelings. It seemed to take some time for her to do so, but finally she removed her hands from her face. The reflection from the glare of the camp fire showed that her cheeks were wet with tears, but her voice was even, though so low that only the ears of the two heard what was said:

“Cochita, you have lived among my people long enough to know that when a young

woman is asked such a question she is given a little time in which to think it over."

The cunning fellow was prepared for this objection.

"True, and such should be your privilege did the circumstances permit, but I am sorry to say they do not. The avowal of my love cannot take you wholly by surprise, for it is not the first time you have heard it."

"No, and you received my answer months ago," said the girl gently.

"It was given so kindly that not all hope was killed within me, though I made pretense that it was."

"Why is there so much haste at this time?"

"Have I not made it clear that the life of yourself and Mrs. Goodale—for I include both in the conditions—depends upon the answer I give Geronimo? If I say to him that you are my promised wife, he will not dare harm either."

"And you wish me to make such a promise?"

The Apache looked wonderingly at her. He did not comprehend the significance of the question. She hastened to explain:

"Why not tell him that you expect me to become your promised wife?"

Cochita seemed to reflect a moment, and then sadly shook his head.

"That will not satisfy Geronimo, whose heart is dark and cruel. He will say to me: 'You must have more than expectation; you must have her promise,' though he will laugh to see that I believe the word of any one of your race. Remember, I do not ask you to become my wife *now*, for that is impossible; if you will promise to accept my suit, say in a week, I shall go back to the Reservation, taking all the Apaches I can with me, and pledge you never to lift my hand against any one of your race. I will make you a good husband and be devoted to you forever. You have but to speak the single word, 'Yes.'"

It was impossible for the elder woman to conceal her feelings. She fidgeted and asked in an impatient undertone:

"Why do you not give him the promise, Minnie? You know you think a great deal of Cochita; you treasure his photograph and often speak kindly of him."

The girl pretended not to hear these

words. She knew their real meaning; so did Cochita, who knew also that if the pledge once passed the lips of the girl it would be held sacred. The only refuge she saw was to strive for time.

"It is as cruel as Geronimo, for you to force me thus, Cochita; you would not have done so a few months ago; I know you would not, for you did not."

"Surely you cannot lose sight of the changed conditions. I do as I do because there is no other course open. In other circumstances, I should be willing to give you a week, a month, a year, if you requested it, but Geronimo, as I told you, is likely to come at any moment, and I must tell him the truth."

"Do you shrink from deceiving him?" asked the girl, quite willing in her sore predicament to shift the task of falsifying to the shoulders of the youth, whom she abominated beyond the power of words to express.

The question seemed to grieve Cochita, who swayed his head.

"One of the virtues I learned from your people is that a falsehood, no matter what

the conditions, is never justifiable. I would die rather than utter that which has even the seeming of not being true."

As a specimen of monumental lying, this declaration was entitled to the palm. It was unique in its way and deceived neither of the hearers, though it was not prudent to enlighten the Apache in that respect. Minnie Goodale persisted:

"You can give me a *little* time; you will not refuse to wait until tomorrow?"

"If you will name the hour when Geronimo will arrive, I will gladly wait until a few minutes before that time, but you need not be reminded that he is now due. If he declares that neither of you shall be spared, will you then blame me?"

"We surely will not do that."

As if fate was playing into the hands of the treacherous Cochita, an Apache at that moment strode out of the gloom into the glare of the camp fire, and paused a few paces away. His shoulders were wrapped about with a blanket, and he held a Winchester in his hand. His gaze was centered upon the three seated ones and he stood for some moments as motionless as a statue,

as if doubting the truth of what he saw. The reflection of firelight gave a peculiar glitter to his black eyes, which reminded the women of a wild animal.

Mrs. Goodale recognized him on the instant, and gasped:

“It is Geronimo!”

“It is he,” whispered Cochita; “I must give him my answer: what shall it be?” he asked, looking at Minnie Goodale.

“You must wait; I shall not answer now.”

“Then I cannot save you,” said Cochita, turning to his chief.

CHAPTER XXV

THE QUARREL

COCHITA was treacherous to the bone. Minnie Goodale was in no more personal danger from the dreaded Geronimo as a simple captive than she would have been as the betrothed wife of the younger chief. It was a trick by which he hoped to extort a pledge dearer to him than anything and everything else in the wide world. Since the leader spoke English very imperfectly, the conversation of the two was in Apache. Although their words were plainly heard by the women, they did not understand one of them. The manner of the two, however, told more than either wished to know.

It happened that Geronimo was in a particularly ugly mood. Thus far his raid had not been as successful as he expected. A band of his warriors had attacked a ranch a few miles distant and received a repulse

in which two bucks were killed and a third badly wounded. Little disposed to show mercy at any time, he now felt revengeful and malignant to the last degree. Woe to the white man, woman, or child who fell into his clutches while this mood was on him.

Before the chief walked from the gloom into the firelight he saw the prisoners seated on the boulder, with Cochita talking to them in their own language. The sight added to his fury. It was known that the leader of the Warm Spring Indians hated the more brilliant Cochita. He was angered when he and several of the tribe went East to learn civilization and to be trained in the ways of the white man. He had threatened to kill him if he ever returned to his people and tried to instruct them in his new-fangled ideas.

Beyond all question, Geronimo would have been quick to carry out his threat had not Cochita flung aside his civilization like a worn garment and become one of the fiercest of the hostiles. He had already committed outrages upon the ranchmen which rehabilitated him with his tribe and took away all

excuse for enmity on the part of the fearful leader.

None the less, the elder distrusted the younger. Probably a feeling of jealousy was at the bottom of this hatred, for he saw the growing influence of his youthful rival, whom he would have been glad to quench forever. And none knew this better than Cochita himself, as he strode forward to meet the chieftain when he came out of the gloom into the glow of the camp-fire.

Cochita made his military salute, to which Geronimo gave no response except to scowl. He glanced meaningly at the captives seated a few paces away, and abruptly asked the question:

"What have you done to-day?"

The pointedness of the demand angered Cochita, but he held himself well in hand.

"I have done as much as Geronimo; I and my men burned a ranch house near the Gila, killed all the members of two families, and destroyed the stage and its driver when on its way from Dead Man's Crossing to Corlita."

"Were there no passengers?"

"There were two."

"What became of them?"

"There they are," replied the younger, with a wave of his hand toward Mrs. Goodale and her niece.

Geronimo turned and fixed his piercing black eyes upon them as if that was the first that he had become aware of their presence. Minnie shuddered when she met the fierce gaze of the terrible leader and saw that he was more interested in her than in her companion. She would have given much for an interpreter. Even she did not suspect the atrocities of which the chieftain was capable. Her relative could not be deceived.

"Why were they spared when the driver was killed?"

"The young woman is an old friend of mine; I knew her in the East among her own people; we met and learned to love each other; before I came back to my people to be as true an Apache as Geronimo, she promised to become my wife."

"Is that why she has come to Arizona?"

"Yes. I promised to meet her at Raymond, but my duties in this raid prevented; but we met the stage on the road, and though she begged that I would spare the life of the driver, it was not done. I said I could not

restrain my men, and she does not doubt the truth of my words."

It will be perceived from the foregoing that Cochita knew how to draw the "long bow" when conversing with a past master of the same art. It is impossible to say whether Geronimo believed the amazing words, but if he did not, he saw that the moment had not come for summary measures. Intense as was his anger, he must wait a more fitting opening for satisfying his vengeance.

Without immediately replying to the younger, he again turned and looked fixedly at the women, giving his chief attention to the younger. Strange thoughts must have seethed through his brain. Minnie returned his gaze and was held by a strange fascination which she could not resist.

"What does it mean?" she asked in a whisper of her aunt.

"Whatever it means, it is sure to be the worst; there is nothing to be expected from Geronimo in the way of mercy, and Cochita is as bad, though he has given you a hope."

"The end must soon come," was the despairing cry of the younger, who ignored the full meaning of what her aunt had said.

Geronimo turned to Cochita and in a voice of suppressed wrath said:

"If what you say is true, take them both from my sight! I suppose that you will make wives of the two! Take them away, and come back that we may agree upon what shall be done; we have wasted too much time already."

And to show his flaming disgust, the chief turned his back upon the younger and scowled the other way. His action sent a thrill of delight through the heart of Cochita. His triumph had been more brilliant, more complete, more unexpected than he had dared to hope. He had carried his point, but was too wise to press his victory. It was the moment, too, for promptness of action.

Making no reply to Geronimo, Cochita walked softly to where the two women sat looking earnestly into his face, and said in a quiet, hurried voice:

"He is in one of his most savage moods; it will not do for us to stay in his presence, for he is determined that both of you shall be slain; if we wait a few minutes longer it will be too late; he has ordered me to leave with you; we must go while we can."

Mrs. Goodale only half believed; Minnie

was bewildered; but what could they do? It would have been the height of folly to refuse, and no choice was left but to obey. As the two rose to their feet the younger slipped her hand down beside her dress. Her revolver was there!

Thus it came about that when Arizona Alf stole near enough to gain a view of the camp where this quarrel had taken place, he saw only Geronimo and four of his bucks near the blaze, smoking their pipes, and the leader sunk in gloomy thought. His scouts were out, but, as we remember, not all had gone well with them, though the chieftain knew nothing of it.

We can understand that the meditations of the ferocious Geronimo gnawed his heart to the core. He had been defied to his face, and when his rival walked away with the captives under his escort most of the other bucks went with him.

It was the latter fact which sent the iron into the heart of the old chieftain. It told more clearly than words of the rising of Cochita's sun and the setting of his own. If this were permitted to go on, he might as well resign his hereditary honor as the head and

front of the Warm Spring branch of the Apache tribe.

The galling memory that rankled in the heart of Geronimo until it became unbearable was the quick yielding he had made to his rival. Instead of insisting upon the death of the captives, he had accepted the avowal of Cochita—and he now knew it was false—that the younger of the two was his affianced wife.

The mating of this full-blooded Apache with one of the hated race was of itself an intolerable insult to which Geronimo never should have assented.

It was not too late to repair the unpardonable weakness he had shown. He rose to his feet and strode savagely toward the camp of Cochita. Arizona Alf saw him go, and, as we remember, hurried off to join his own friends, with tidings of what he had learned. Although it was impossible to know the whole truth, his shrewdness suggested that Geronimo was in all probability on his way to meet Cochita, and that the crisis which the cowboy dreaded was at hand.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE PLEDGE

THE situation of Cochita had become critical. While his triumph for the time had been as complete as it was unexpected, he knew he was on the edge of the greatest peril that he had yet faced. The American troopers who were warm on the trail of the raiding Apaches were not disposed to show him more consideration than they would show Geronimo himself, if they could get within striking distance of the two. Some of the cavalry felt a hotter resentment toward the younger than toward the elder. The former had received unusual advantages in training among the white men; he had been shown favors equal to any given to his race; he knew right and wrong, and there was no palliation for his lapse into barbarism.

Cochita was aware of this peculiar resentment. His only path to the favor of the authorities was through some act of friend-

ship to those whom the fates of war had placed in his hands. If he restored the aunt and her niece unharmed to their friends, he need have no fear of punishment for what he had previously done.

But powerful as might be this motive, the young Apache resolved with flashing eyes and compressed lips that the prisoners should be saved only through the single condition that has been named: Minnie Goodale must first give the pledge she had steadfastly refused thus far to give. If she persisted in refusal and the moment came when he must abandon all hope, he would turn his back upon her and her relative, and not raise a finger to save them.

Could Cochita have had his choice, he would have allowed none of the bucks to accompany him when he left Geronimo's camp, for their presence must act as a hindrance in carrying out his plans. He dared not withdraw from the party with the women in his charge, for some of them would be sure to follow and strike all down. Although most of the party had gone with him to this place, they were led to do so through the simplest of reasons. They knew that his

camp was much better than the one where it had been agreed the scattered hostiles should come together, for it contained an abundance of both grass and water. Their ponies were turned loose where they could help themselves, while a new fire was started, and another of the bucks who had shot a young cow, partly broiled the meat, upon which he and his companions feasted.

Minnie and her aunt, having already eaten, did not partake of the crude meal. They dreaded the presence of so many Apaches, the number, including Cochita, being nine; and seating themselves as far removed from them as they dared, the companions in misery and wretchedness furtively watched, fearing that an outbreak might come at any moment. Cochita hovered near, but was forced to give most of his attention to the bucks, who were feasting, smoking, and talking with one another.

The elder captive clasped the hand of the younger, who was groping with her fingers for the grasp which gave her so much encouragement and fortitude.

“Do you believe, Aunty, what Cochita said to us?”

"I have no faith at all in him!" was the sturdy reply.

"What we saw agreed with what he told us; Geronimo ordered him to take us out of his sight; that could not have been done without the old chief's permission."

"You may be sure Cochita never tells the truth except when it is to his interest to do so. If Geronimo ordered him to leave with us, why did so many of the Apaches also come? Our party is larger than the one we left behind."

"I don't understand many things that we have seen to-night. God has been so good to us that I am sure He will not desert us in our extremity."

"You haven't lost your revolver?" asked the elder abruptly.

"No danger; I shall take care of that. Remember, only one chamber is empty; I shall use the others when I must."

"And there's no saying how soon that will be; it seemed to me more than once that the moment was at hand. But if you do shoot anyone, Minnie, the first should be Cochita."

"I pray the time may never come, but I am ready for almost anything."

At this juncture something took place, the

significance of which neither of the women understood. Cochita was talking with one of the bucks, the two being some paces from the captives, when another Indian came out of the gloom and intruded into the conversation. Red men rarely show excitement, but it was apparent from the manner of the new arrival that he bore important tidings and that Cochita so regarded it. He asked hurried questions and then spoke to two others. A minute later they disappeared in company with the messenger.

The explanation, as was afterward learned, was this:

The messenger brought news that one of the Apache sentinels, stationed not far off, had been killed. Not only had he been slain, but one of the avenues of approach was thus left unguarded. The buck who brought the news had made a hurried search through the immediate vicinity, but learned nothing that could throw light on the tragedy.

The conclusion was almost inevitable: the United States troopers were in that part of the Santa Catalina range, or at least their scouts had penetrated thus far, and an attack was imminent. Such, I say, was the

manifest conclusion, but a shadow of doubt remained. There were feuds among the Apaches, and more than once a warrior took advantage of the chance offered by a raid to wipe out old scores. We know that the same thing has occurred among our own people in battle. I may add, by way of parenthesis, that the most conspicuous example resting upon credible testimony is that General Wolfe was shot by one of his own men before the walls of Quebec in the moment of victory.

Cochita knew that the sentinel who had fallen had been a bitter enemy of the buck who brought the tidings of his death. What more likely than that the dead Apache was the victim of treachery? The probability, however, was the other way, and the young chief was not rash enough to run unnecessary risk. He hurried the sentinel back, and with him went two of the best scouts in the band, who needed no orders to do their utmost to guard against surprise.

Cochita even saw in the threatened danger a possible benefit to himself. The confusion would give him a chance to hurry his captives into a place of safety, where he could turn them over to the custody of their friends and

reap the reward to which they at least would admit he was entitled.

But the real step had not yet been taken; the all-important pledge remained unspoken. Time was becoming so precious that even the minutes could not be wasted. He resolved to force matters to an issue without further delay.

With this determination, he went over to where the women sat and placed himself on the ground in front of them. They were so far removed from the blaze that the reflection showed their figures dimly.

"Are we done with Geronimo?" asked Minnie, because she could think of nothing better to say.

"I wish I could believe so, but I'm sure we are not."

"Why not?"

"He and I had a quarrel; he can see no reason why any of you should be shown mercy; he says that Hiram Goodale is one of his bitterest enemies and he would be a fool to act the part of a squaw when the Great Spirit has given the ranchman's wife to him."

This remark roused the anger of Mrs. Goodale, and a brisk interchange followed between her and Cochita.

"If Geronimo said that, he lies, and he knows it. Neither he nor any of your people has ever stopped at our house without receiving our hospitality. You have been there, and so has Geronimo, and both were used better than you and he deserved."

Minnie gave her relative's hand a warning squeeze. It would have been better had not the last remark been made. Cochita knew that the elder woman disliked him, while he detested her. He tolerated her because it was prudent to do so in the circumstances.

"Cochita is always used better than he deserves," replied that youth in a doleful tone which was meant as an appeal to the sympathy of the younger, "but other persons have been kind to him. I know Geronimo is bad, but am I not the friend of the white man?"

"If so, appearances are very much against you; these bucks in your company belong on the Reservation, and you ought to be there with them."

"I have explained that I came along with the hope of restraining and persuading them to go back."

"You don't seem to have much success."

"I am not yet through, but I have saved two or three ranches."

"You are taking a long time to save *us*."

"When have I had the opportunity?"

"You have had several as good, if not better, than the present; when you came to us on the plain, we asked you to escort us home, but you would not."

"I gave you excellent reasons for declining."

"I do not see that they were excellent."

"There are a great many things which you cannot see; but Miss Goodale will agree with me, I am sure."

Minnie preferred to remain mute. Her aunt seemed to be more desirous of conversing than she could feel. Cochita paused as if he expected something in the way of confirmation from the younger, but before he could speak again his name was called. Excusing himself, he sprang up and hurried to the blaze, where three of the bucks were holding an animated conversation.

"The wretch!" exclaimed the ranchman's wife in contemptuous disgust; "does he think he can deceive me? He could have taken us home this afternoon; we are in more danger now than we have been at any time. Oh, if

the cavalry would come, or if Hiram and the rest of the men were near enough to strike a blow for us!"

"I am afraid they will not get the chance; and, Aunt, I don't believe that if I should say *yes* to Cochita, he can save us."

"He is sure to *try* to do so, and it is certain he won't try if you say *no*. But you are the most foolish child I ever knew; I am through trying to persuade you to show any common sense."

"Please don't scold; I am so tired!"

The wearied girl laid her head on the lap of her aunt, whose heart went out in sympathy to the stricken one. She smoothed the abundant hair and caressed the warm cheek as affectionately as if Minnie were her own daughter.

Meanwhile, the elder woman kept her gaze upon the young chief. He talked fast with the two bucks, all making many gestures. Truth to tell, the couple were friends of Cochita, and they had come to warn him of his danger. Geronimo had allowed his rival to leave his camp with the females, but he already regretted his weakness, and there could be no doubt that he was determined to repair his blunder.

The aunt was still soothingly stroking the young girl's hair and fondling the velvety cheek, when the scene once witnessed that evening was repeated. The chief of the Warm Spring band strode into the circle of firelight. If he had been in a furious mood before, his rage had become a flame in its intensity.

Cochita, knowing what was coming, acted as if he did not see Geronimo. He walked quickly to where the two captives were seated in the shadows.

"Miss Goodale, I must have your answer at once; it cannot be put off another minute; your life is hanging in the balance; what is it?"

"Yes," was the faint reply.

Cochita started, hardly believing he had heard aright.

"I have your promise that you will become my wife if I deliver you out of your peril and restore you to your friends?"

"Yes," was the low but perfectly distinct reply.

CHAPTER XXVII

AN INTERRUPTION

I MAY repeat that Geronimo was one of the most cunning of his race.

President Roosevelt proved that he knew all about the demon when the Apache begged him, with tears in his eyes, to permit him to go back to his old tramping grounds in Arizona, there to spend his last days. It was at the inauguration of the President on March 4th 1905, that Geronimo went from his enforced home in the East to Washington, to beg this favor. Mr. Roosevelt listened to the whining old scamp, and replied:

“You have committed so many crimes in the Southwest that it would alarm hundreds of settlers to know you had returned.”

“But they will be in no danger,” protested Geronimo in his limping English.

“I don’t suppose they will, but *you* certainly will; there are too many old scores which the people out there long to wipe out. If you

place any value on your life, you will be glad to stay in your present quarters, where you never suffer for food or clothing. At any rate, I shall wait before granting your request."

It was some twenty years before this date that Geronimo started upon his last memorable raid from the San Carlos Reservation, connected with which occurred, among others, the incidents I have undertaken to relate. Even then the famous leader was an old man, but few bucks of half his years were his equal in power, activity, and endurance. His coarse, dangling hair was still as black as midnight, his serpent-like eye was undimmed; he could strike as resistlessly as ever, and his hatred of the white people made him a merciless enemy.

He knew how to hide his designs. When he played the good Indian he did it with perfect skill. Docile even to the point of humility, he lulled the suspicions of many who had been deceived repeatedly. He would talk with the officers who had helped to run him down when on his forays, would grin as all recalled the stirring times on the flaming plains or in the wildest recesses of the

mountains, and would declare that he had had more than enough of that kind of life. Never again would he rush the Reservation, even though our government treated him and his people with injustice. If the officers who thus chatted with the scourge of the Southwest inquired for him the next day, they were probably told that he and a party of turbulent bucks were skurrying for Mexico, leaving a trail of blood and fire and death behind them.

When Geronimo reached the last camp of Cochita, he had fixed in his mind the plan he meant to follow. He had noted the signs of sympathy among his men for Cochita, and he meant to crush the threatening revolt before it could come to a head.

He felt his way with rare tact. He must not strike until everything was ready. Affecting not to see the captives who were sitting in the edge of the shadow, he summoned the bucks around him. Every one went forward, Cochita the foremost. The elder glanced into their faces and then said something in an undertone to the young chief. The latter glanced around and in turn spoke to the nearest buck, who hurried off in the

gloom, taking a course that led directly away from Mrs. Goodale and her niece. The elder gently stirred the head resting upon her knee, and Minnie opened her eyes and sat up.

"What is it, Aunty?"

"Geronimo is here again; they are all so interested in what he is saying that they seem to have forgotten us for the moment."

"Is there any hope?" asked Minnie, thrilled by the thought.

"There may be; if we can get a slight start in the darkness, we ought to give them the slip; some of the soldiers must be in the neighborhood, and Hiram and Alf and Micah and Bob are surely searching for us. We can lose nothing by trying."

They listened. All was so still, with the exception of the group in front of the blaze, that the two were strongly tempted. Indeed, the aunt was in the act of quietly rising to her feet, when Minnie pulled her back.

"Too late," she whispered.

"We ought to have tried it at once."

Neither saw any form in the gloom, but both caught the soft rustling of a moccasin, whose owner doubtless meant thus to warn them of his nearness. When Geronimo spoke

to Cochita it was to remind him that the captives were not properly guarded. The younger chief hurriedly sent one of the bucks to correct the oversight. He made a detour and approached the two from the rear in time to prevent the attempt, which, as the elder had said, might have succeeded had it been made a minute or two earlier.

Following his shrewd policy, Geronimo ignored the angry words that had passed between him and Cochita a short time before. He even showed a deference to the younger which deceived every one except Cochita himself.

One fact was manifest to all. Although in the brief time since the Apaches left the Reservation, they had committed many outrages in their whirlwind raid, they had suffered more than usual when on their forays. Several of their best men were killed, and Geronimo had just learned of the sentinel who had been hoisted over the "Great Divide." Never disposed to regard any of the rules of civilized warfare, he was, if possible, more intense in his resentment than before. As I have said, however, he dissembled his consuming wrath and called the hated Cochita

and bucks around him to consult and give orders for the pressing of his furious campaign.

"We have been too long in the mountains," he said; "the white soldiers are on our trail and, if we linger, will strike like the rattlesnake before we can dodge the blow."

Grunts of approval followed these words.

"We have lost some of our best men. This has come because we divided our party. Cochita has done well, but he is a young man and must do better."

The silence lasted a full minute. The chief to whom he referred was angered by the slur, for he knew that Geronimo and most of the bucks knew of the murderous blows he had struck. Cochita understood how to restrain himself also, but he could not keep back the words, spoken in an ordinary voice:

"I have done my best; who can do more?"

"Even Geronimo has not always been right; has he not just confessed that it was a mistake to divide our men? Who made the division?"

It is wise in some circumstances not to hear direct questions. When a speaker is able to think of a crushing reply, he gains much by doing so; otherwise, it is best to hold his peace.

"The cavalry are hard on our heels, but we care nothing for them. Even though their scouts have penetrated into the mountains, if they attack they shall be slain. We must push southward to Mexico. All of you know the mountain spurs as well as you know the Santa Catalina. The cavalry cannot follow us far into any of them."

The wily leader saw that his followers were fast rising to the pitch which he had set.

"Between us and Mexico are many ranches which cannot know of our coming until we descend upon them; we shall be ahead of the troopers, and if they press us hard, we shall cross into Mexico, where we shall be safe from pursuit."

Geronimo knew he was uttering an untruth, for an agreement had been made between the American and Mexican governments, by which the cavalry of either country was allowed to pursue dusky raiders across the line, and to run them down no matter where they took refuge. Some of the chieftain's bucks were also aware of the fact. Cochita certainly was, though he thought it prudent to hold his peace.

The coppery faces glowed in the glare of the

firelight. It was their supreme delight, their exquisite pleasure to rush down upon the unprepared ranchmen, slay and destroy, and then make off again like a cyclone. They had done it times without number and were thrilled by the prospect of doing it again.

The psychological moment had come and Geronimo seized it. Glancing from one gleaming face to another, he called in his penetrating voice:

"Who shall lead you, Geronimo or Cochita?"

"Geronimo! None but Geronimo!" was the eager response.

Cochita was as shrewd as the veteran. He saw what was coming, and his response was louder than that of his companions. Holding his Winchester grasped at the base of the barrel, he swung it over his head and fairly leaped from the ground. His ardor deceived all except Geronimo.

"Shall we take prisoners?" demanded the chieftain.

"The Apaches take no prisoners," was the reply; and, as before, it was Cochita whose voice rose above the others.

"What shall be done with those that have been taken?"

“Let them be slain!”

In this cry Cochita took no part. He saw the question was inevitable. He had received only a short time before the reply for which his heart had long yearned, and he stood ready to risk his life, no matter how hopeless the chance, to save one at least of the captives. What his precise plan was cannot be known, except he that was determined to resist to the death any harm to her who was dearer to him than life itself.

The decisive test must have been precipitated the next moment, with the result scarcely in doubt, when one of those unexplainable incidents that sometimes occur interrupted and changed the whole aspect of the situation.

CHAPTER XXVIII

IN THE NICK OF TIME

CORPORAL BILLY BIDWELL was one of the bravest Indian campaigners in the Southwest. He had fought under General Crook, and helped to trail the raiding Apaches to the border of Mexico, and through hundreds of miles of mountains, and across the flaming, sun-baked plains of Arizona and New Mexico. In every instance he added to his reputation for daring coolness and fertility of resource, which none of his companions surpassed and few equaled.

There was Irish blood in Corporal Billy's veins, and his good-nature and fondness for a joke made him popular with, though sometimes dreaded by, his comrades; for there was no telling what form his proclivity for mischief would take, or when it would break out. Withal, his heart was as tender as a woman's. He would risk his life, as he had done many a time, to save another from death or harm,

and the cry of distress in his case never fell upon deaf ears. When Lieutenant Smith was shot through both thighs and lay helpless between the lines, with three Apaches swooping down upon the poor fellow, it was Billy who rushed out alone, checked the charge of the assailants by several shots from his revolver, seized the lieutenant in his arms, swung him over his shoulder, and skurried back behind the rocks amid a hail of bullets. Depositing his superior officer behind a rock, he saluted and said:

“The compliments of Corporal Bidwell, and, begging pardon, he requests that next time Lieutenant Smith gets plugged, he receives the bullets in his head so as to save his legs for running.”

Corporal Billy was twice captured by the Apaches, who were not long in finding that they had caught a Tartar. In the first instance, he was held no more than half an hour, when he shot a buck from his pony, leaped upon the back of the animal, rode down an Indian in his path, and got back to his own troopers without an abrasion of the skin. How it was the vigilant redskins allowed him to retain his carbine was a

mystery, for it was that weapon which was the means of his escape.

There was something about his second capture that was never explained. He was actually held over night by the hostiles, and walked into his own camp the next day, smiling and unharmed. Why the Apaches spared him for that length of time, and by what means he succeeded in eluding them in the end was beyond the comprehension of his comrades. When pressed for an explanation, the Corporal said that he was guarded by eleven bucks, among whom was a chief. They used such insulting language that he lost his temper, and, seizing the chief by the ankles, he used him as a shillaleh and banged the life out of the others. I am afraid the Corporal exaggerated in his account of the affair.

Billy's wife had been dead for five years, and his only child, Molly, was living in Denver with her grandmother. The sweet little girl, who inherited the merry, affectionate nature of her father, was the apple of his eye. At rare intervals, when he could secure a furlough, he hied away to distant Denver, and no two happier mortals ever lived than father and child while together. He longed to have her

with him all the time, but that was impossible. He meant that she should be well reared and educated, and the only place where that could be done was in the home of her grandparent. It was the true, unselfish love of the father which made him repress his yearnings and think only of that which was best for the child.

On the day preceding the break of Geronimo and Cochita from the San Carlos Reservation, Corporal Billy received one of his long letters from Molly, enclosed in which was a fine photograph taken on the last anniversary of her birth. The delight of the parent was touching. He kissed the picture repeatedly, showed it to his comrades, and even submitted it to the captain of his company and the colonel of the regiment. All expressed their admiration for the beautiful child with the laughing eyes, for she was worthy of their compliments, and they sympathized with the pride and love of the brave father.

The next day the cavalry started hot-foot after Geronimo, Cochita, and the hostiles who had set out on their whirlwind career of death and destruction. The precious portrait was shoved into Billy's breast pocket, next his

heart. Many times he gently drew it out when they were galloping over the blistering plains, fondly contemplated the loved features, touched his lips softly to the face, and then reverently put the portrait back again. Those of his comrades who witnessed the act did not smile. The sight touched a responsive chord in more than one heart, and all liked Billy too well to wound his feelings.

"If either should die, the other would not long survive," was the thought of more than one trooper.

Corporal Billy was always given the most dangerous and difficult work when duty led him to take the trail of the dusky raiders. This was because he was a skilful scout, and none knew Apache nature better than he. Moreover, there was never any shrinking on his part. If the task was capable of human achievement, it would be performed.

I have told enough concerning this admirable soldier for you to understand how he and several brother scouts came to be in the Santa Catalina mountains on the night which witnessed most of the incidents I have narrated. His business, as well as that of most of his comrades, was to locate the camp of the hos-

tiles, and especially to find an opening to assail Geronimo and Cochita; for the Corporal believed, as did the best informed of his friends, that the younger was as dangerous as the elder.

It was because of the division of the raiders that the work of the white scouts became more difficult. Besides, as I have shown, there was a passing to and fro by the two leaders which helped to complicate matters. The main force of the cavalry was a mile distant among the foothills, awaiting the summons from the scouts to advance and strike their blows, or to resume the pursuit, for it was not to be supposed that Geronimo would linger in the mountains an hour longer than necessary, especially after he learned how close the American cavalry had come.

The evening was well forward when the Corporal, who had been scouting for several hours, having left his horse picketed in a deep ravine whose outlet was familiar to him, approached the vicinity of the camp where Cochita and Geronimo faced each other, as was described in the preceding chapter. It was necessary for Billy to call all his consummate woodcraft into play, for he knew the

Apache scouts were near, and a collision with them might take place at any moment.

The course of events brought the Corporal closer to Bob Goodale than to any other of the white men, though neither for a time was aware of the fact. The youth, while awaiting the return of Arizona Alf from his scout, had strayed for a short distance from his other friends, on a venture of his own. He was restless and distressed over the delay in getting knowledge of his sister and aunt, but he had learned his lesson too well to run more risk by going far from his uncle and Long Micah.

Bob had reached a point in the ravine referred to, when he decided that it was unwise to proceed farther, and he halted. He took care to keep in the shadow, and to use his ears and eyes to the utmost. He stood with his back against a rock, and his Winchester held in front with both hands. The gorge at that place was fifty feet or more in width, and was filled with boulders, amid which grew stunted vegetation, and a trickling sound indicated that a small stream twisted its way through the middle of the ravine. The brook was so slight that only by close listening could its flow be heard.

Bob had stood thus for a few minutes, when he became aware that some one was in the faintly lit gorge a little way to the right. It did not seem to the youth that he had heard anything, but rather that he *felt* the presence of a stranger. Secure in his own concealment, he stood as motionless as the rock behind him and awaited what was to come.

The suspicion became certainty. Some one was moving along the other side of the ravine and keeping so close within the shadow that not the faintest glimpse could be caught of him. Bob believed it was an Apache, for he knew that none of his friends was near; but in the circumstances the youth was quite content to leave the buck undisturbed so long as he showed no disposition to interfere with the young man himself.

When almost directly opposite, Bob was amazed to observe the flicker of a tiny blaze—so tiny, indeed, that he knew it was caused by an ordinary match. There was no breeze stirring, and the man who had ignited the light did not shade the dainty flame with his hands. As it flared out, the reflection revealed a bearded face, a Roman nose, and the forepiece of a cavalry cap. In the other hand the

trooper held a cabinet photograph, with the burning match in front of the picture so as to show the portrait plainly. The crouching form was as motionless as a statue for the few seconds that the picture was disclosed; then the man touched his lips to the portrait flung aside the flickering match, and became invisible in the gloom.

Corporal Bidwell, the trained scout, the master of woodcraft, the resourceful frontiersman, forgot his natural caution and, for the sake of looking again upon the features of his Molly, had thrown prudence to the winds and struck a match in the very center of the most imminent peril. No other cause under heaven could have induced him to do such a thing.

Bob Goodale had been quick to recognize the stranger as a white trooper, and his heart leaped at the knowledge that other friends were near at hand. He was on the point of making a cautious signal to the soldier, when the thought came that by doing so he might interfere with the plans Arizona Alf was carrying out. The situation was so delicate that the youth did not dare move or speak, lest he might destroy the chances of success.

That the cavalryman was stealing up the

gorge was certain, though Bob could not see him. To his surprise, however, he awoke to the fact within the next minute or two that a second person was also moving up the ravine behind the trooper. Bob could not see him, and it seemed that the knowledge came through that unexplainable sixth sense which intervenes now and then in the affairs of men.

If a second person was following the first with such caution, he must be an enemy, and if an enemy, he could be no other than an Apache buck.

"I can't stand here and allow that thing to go on, but what is to be done?"

CHAPTER XXIX

THE FLIGHT

THE question was answered the next moment, when the shadowy pursuer, in order to flank an obstruction, moved just far enough toward the middle of the ravine to reveal that he was, as Bob had supposed, an Apache buck. The flicker of the match had disclosed the trooper to the dusky scout, and a momentary carelessness on the part of the latter had made known his identity to the young tenderfoot.

The fearful business of the Apache was apparent: he was stealing behind the trooper cavalryman for the only purpose that could actuate the dusky assassin. The love of Corporal Bidwell for his little Molly had led him into an oversight or forgetfulness that was likely to be fatal, and would have inevitably proved such but for the providential presence of young Bob Goodale in the gorge.

The first thought of the youth was to shout

a warning to the trooper. That no doubt would have been effective, but it would also have brought the Apache and the youth in collision. A more effective plan presented itself.

"I think this is a good time to fire off a gun!"

And Bob Goodale fired it at the moment the buck was fading from view in the gloom of the protecting shadow. Then, without lingering, the youth hurried out of the ravine to rejoin his friends, and with them to hasten to the deserted camp for food.

You will recall that we left matters in a critical situation at the camp of Cochita. Geronimo had made his fervid appeal to his bucks, who answered with ardor; and it was agreed not only to take no prisoners, but to slay those that had already been taken.

It was at this critical juncture that the report of a rifle rang out in the stillness, accompanied by the piercing shriek which left no doubt that another Apache buck had passed to his eternal hunting grounds. Such being the fact, the further inference was inevitable that the United States troopers had reached the neighborhood, for the sounds

came from a point but little removed from the camp.

Probably there was not one among the Apaches who did not expect a destructive volley the next moment, and the way the whole party skurried into the gloom for shelter would have been ludicrous at other times. A noteworthy fact was that several, and among them both Geronimo and Cochita, dodged and ducked their heads to elude the expected bullets. In a twinkling the camp was deserted.

Cochita seemed to be the first to recover his wits. He had run but a few rods when he recalled that the captives would be left behind. He turned and was back in an instant.

"Come with me at once or we are lost!" he said, seizing the hand of Minnie.

"Who are they?" asked the older woman, naturally thinking that any persons from whom the Apaches fled must be the friends of her and her niece. She held back, and the younger strove to do the same, but the grip of Cochita was of iron.

"They are our friends," persisted Mrs. Goodale; "let us remain to meet them—"

Cochita's rage was fearful. Dropping the

hand of the girl, he whipped out his revolver and leveled it at the aunt.

"If you wait a second, I will shoot you!"

Minnie gasped and said:

"Lead on and we will follow!"

Mrs. Goodale was terrified and hastily complied with the command. She longed to remind her niece that she, too, had a weapon at hand, for the girl in the flurry of the moment seemed to have forgotten the fact. Now was the time of all others in which to appeal to it, but the three were so near one another that any word spoken by one must have been heard by the rest. Before Minnie could draw her revolver Cochita would interpose. There must be no open enmity between the parties, and the elder affected a meekness which she was far from feeling.

And yet in that moment of horror, one reflection brought a peculiar pleasure to the elder woman. No one else suspected her secret. Subtle as was Cochita, she had outwitted him in one respect and in an astounding manner. I shall soon explain.

Events followed far more quickly than they are told. When Bob Goodale hurried back to his friends and told them the meaning of the

shot fired by him, Arizona Alf gave it a true interpretation, so far as it went.

"I have suspected for an hour that the United States troopers are closing in on the Apache camp. There's no chance of reaching an understanding with them, for time will not allow. We must go ahead as if we had no friends within a hundred miles."

Meanwhile, Cochita had recovered his wits. He did not regret the outburst of wrath he had shown. It would save embarrassing trouble with the elder woman, whom he hated. When the proper time came, perhaps he would apologize. At any rate, he could make it clear to Minnie that such harsh words were necessary that he might save both.

It would seem curious that in view of the pledge which Cochita had received earlier in the evening, he did not adopt the simple course of delivering the captives without delay to their friends in the neighborhood. He had declared that her promise once made was all he asked, and he was willing to await her pleasure for its fulfillment. But if he surrendered the prisoners at this juncture, it would have the appearance of being done through fear. He could be fairly accused of abandoning them to

secure his own safety, and when he returned to claim his prize he would be laughed to scorn by her friends, while she herself would insist that she was released from the promise because of his failure to comply with its chief condition.

Cochita's motive therefore will be understood, when he compelled the two women to accompany him part way in his flight. First of all, her people must be convinced of their inability to rescue her, when he would proceed to surrender them in the dramatic fashion which was so dear to him.

The bucks had scattered in such a panic that the three were left wholly to themselves. They had gone but a little way, when Cochita released the hand he had been tightly gripping, and silently slipped to the rear. In this position he could watch them better than when at the front or to one side.

The young chief could not have had a more difficult or dangerous task, for he was not only obliged to be on guard against a sudden attack by white men, but he was certain that some of his own Apaches, as soon as the flurry was over, would attempt to slay both the captives. What quicker or more effective solving

of the question could be devised? It was this probable contingency that troubled him more than all else.

The trail, which Cochita's familiarity with the neighborhood enabled him to find with little delay, was wide enough for aunt and niece to clasp hands, though they shrank from speaking when they knew every word would be heard by the figure walking noiselessly behind them.

“Ah, why did Minnie forget the weapon in her pocket?” thought her relative; “she is as brave as she can be, and there were a few moments when she might have removed the peril that now incloses us. Cochita showed his real nature when he aimed his pistol at me; never were truer words spoken than when I said he is more to be dreaded than Geronimo himself. Our friends must be near at hand—”

The abrupt halt of Minnie at this moment told her aunt that she had made an important discovery. The elder would have seen it in the same instant, had she not been occupied with her own communings. In the path ahead, dimly revealed by the moonlight, an Apache was standing in such an attitude that

it was apparent he was waiting for the women. Even the wisest of people have their percentage of fools. The buck was one of the group that had been stirred by the furious outburst of Geronimo, and, having fled far enough to feel free from danger, he now coolly resolved to carry out the purpose formed in answer to the appeal of the Warm Spring leader.

It was not the intention of the Apache to harm Cochita, against whom he felt no special resentment, but to slay the women. That was what he was waiting to do, and he expected to carry out his dreadful purpose as soon as they came within reach.

The incredible stupidity of this red man lay in his ignoring of Cochita, who had the captives in charge. The young chief was quicker than the women to read the sinister purpose of the buck, and he fired over the heads of the captives. The Indian was whisked out of existence so quickly that he could hardly have understood how it came about.

"Pass on," said the escort; "he will not harm you."

The information was unnecessary, but it was characteristic of the ranchman's wife that, as she and her niece skirted the senseless form,

she sighed and wished that events had been so ordered that the victim were Cochita himself.

The chief feared the consequences of the shot which he had been compelled to make. The report must have been heard by more than a score, counting the white as well as the red men. While it would be understood by only a few, Cochita was confident Geronimo would be one of the few. It was important, therefore, that he should get the captives away from the immediate neighborhood with the least possible delay. He took his place at the head and walked faster than at any time since setting out. They had gone less than a hundred yards when they came to a point where the trail forked.

Here Cochita paused, for he was in doubt which course to take. By turning to the left, he would circle about and come back to the camp from which he had fled in a panic. By turning to the right, he could gradually work his way out of the foothills into the open, whence it would not be hard to tramp to Corlita or even to the ranch of Hiram Goodale. There was hardly a possibility of obtaining ponies, no matter which course was taken, for

the section was too rough for the advantageous use of the animals.

For several minutes the three stood, silent and peering into the gloom. The women may have had as keen a vision as their captor, but his ear was trained to a finer point, and he soon detected something, inaudible to them, which caused him uneasiness.

CHAPTER XXX

AN APACHE'S NERVE

“REMAIN here a few minutes,” said Cochita in an undertone; “I fear enemies are near us; I shall not be gone long.”

With the noiselessness of a shadow, the Apache moved off in the gloom, and again aunt and niece were left for a brief time to themselves.

“Do you believe he told the truth?” whispered Minnie.

“Not unless he hoped to gain by it; I say, as I have said before, that I should rather trust myself with Geronimo than with him. There is some excuse for the old man, but none for the younger.”

“You cannot deny that he saved our lives more than once to-night.”

“For his own purpose. He would slay us both as remorselessly as he shot down that Apache a few minutes ago.”

"Geronimo was determined to kill us and would have done so but for Cochita."

"How can you know that? We could not understand a word that passed between them."

"It was not necessary; their looks and manner showed their feelings."

"Because they seemed to agree with what Cochita told us—I wonder how far he has gone?" abruptly asked the elder, peering into the gloom.

"Do you think we have a chance of slipping away?"

"That is what is in my mind; I am tempted to try it."

"I should be glad to do so, if I could believe there is any hope."

"And why isn't there hope?"

"It seems to me we could not be in greater peril; we were on the eve of making the attempt some time ago, only to find we had no chance at all."

"Suppose we did go a few steps, and he discovered us; he would not attempt to punish either for doing the most natural thing in the world."

"It is not he alone; the Apaches are all around us, and we may need the protection again of Cochita."

"But our friends are not far off."

"They know not where to turn to find us, nor do we know where to look for them; we have no means of signaling to each other. But for what just happened, I should say we ought to go without another second's delay."

"You seem to forget that you have a revolver, with several chambers loaded, and I know of no girl as skilful as you in handling it."

Minnie reached into her pocket and drew out the little weapon.

"I can see now that I threw away more than one chance, but I promise not to do so again."

"I wish you would let me have it," said the aunt, extending her hand; "I can shoot almost as well as you."

"What is to be gained by giving the pistol to you?"

"I shan't throw away any chance as you did."

"I have given you my promise; I will keep it."

The elder knew it was useless to argue with the girl, and she believed she could be relied upon in any emergency that was likely to arise.

Few as were the minutes that had passed since the departure of their escort, the captives grew more resolved to make a break for liberty. That which restrained them was their utter unfamiliarity with the surroundings, and the fact that they were almost certain in avoiding Cochita to meet others more to be dreaded than he.

You can understand the extreme reluctance of Minnie Goodale to use her revolver against the youthful chief, to whose hideous nature she could not close her eyes. She would not have hesitated for an instant (indeed, she had proved that fact) in the case of any other member of his tribe, but she hoped that in some way she might be spared the necessity of shooting the one with whom she had danced a cotillion, and whose cabinet photograph was in her album on the parlor table at home. Only the direct necessity could warrant the act, and her aunt, less sentimental than she, did not doubt that the necessity for such act was close at hand.

When about to move away, the two leaned forward, peered, and listened. Then they took several stealthy steps up the trail, but were still unable to see or hear anything.

-

Suddenly the aunt, who was holding the hand of her niece, gave a warning pressure.

"Do you hear it?" she asked in the lowest whisper.

"Yes! Sh!"

Faintly and yet unmistakably the murmur of voices came from the direction taken by the Apache. The words could not be distinguished, but there was no doubt that two persons at least were talking near at hand, and one of them was Cochita.

"What can it mean?" asked the aunt in the same whisper.

"He has met some one; but, aunty!" added the girl, much startled, "*they are talking in English!*"

They listened. It was impossible to catch the words, and the aunt did not understand why her niece was so positive on the significant point.

"What was it you heard, Minnie?"

"One of them—I don't know which—said, '*All right,*' in reply to something said by the other."

"Was the speaker Cochita or some one else?"

"Of that I am not sure. Let us listen."

They did so. Neither was able to distinguish anything said, and in a short time the faint sounds ceased altogether.

"That means Cochita is returning," whispered Minnie; "we must wait."

The Apache had been forced to extend his reconnaissance slightly farther than he intended when he left the side of the captives. He must learn whether the path he wished to follow was open, before venturing into it with the women. He did not forget the temptation which he knew would come to them in his absence, which he meant to make as brief as possible.

We know that Cochita was a master of woodcraft, and none understood his own people better than he. He called his skill into play, and had not gone far when he discovered that some one else was in the trail ahead of him.

Cochita instantly halted in the sheltering shadow, on the alert for whoever he might be called upon to confront. It did not take him long to learn that the other person was as trained and skilful a scout as himself. With remarkable quickness, he decided that he was a white man, not because of his skill, but be-

cause he was using such extreme caution. If he were a member of his own race, he would have been less careful than usual, provided he was hunting for Cochita and the captives. That he was advancing with so much stealth indicated that he was one of the veteran white scouts, who believed he was close to the Apache camp.

Taking care to keep invisible, the extraordinary Apache now gave an exhibition of nerve which must compel the admiration of those who detested him. He determined to assume the part of a white man. This, after all, was not difficult so long as he remained out of sight, since he spoke the English language without a trace of accent; but as a piece of brilliant daring his act could not have been surpassed.

He emitted a hissing sound like that of a serpent. It instantly caught the notice of the other, who replied, thus enabling Cochita to locate the point where the man was crouching.

Having thus established communication, the two for a minute were silent. Then the other, using his hand for a funnel, asked in a husky whisper:

“Who are you?”

"Sh! not so loud; the Apaches are near."

"I know it blamed well; come over here."

"Not yet."

"Then I'll come to you."

The temptation was strong to permit the scout to do as he proposed; for in approaching the young chief, the latter would be given a fatal advantage. The intruder thus far was unsuspecting of the trick being played upon him. Why should he suspect that a man who could speak English perfectly was an Apache Indian?

It was no consideration for the other that led Cochita to hold him off; it was the dread of the complication that would be caused by the report of a rifle that more than likely would figure in the meeting between the two.

"There's too much moonlight; stay where you are for a while."

"All right, but it seems to me things are getting mixed; if we don't look out Geronimo and Cochita will give us the slip."

"No fear of that; Cochita has charge of the women and is doing his best to protect them from the Apaches; he has a hard task."

"Why doesn't he deliver the women to their friends? There are plenty of 'em in the moun-

tians and they will help; but I've no faith in that imp. How do *you* know so much about him?"

No reply came to this question, and Corporal Bidwell—for it was he—stealthily made his way down the trail to the point whence the voice had come. He spoke again but received no answer, nor could he gain a glimpse of the fellow, who, when asked to give his name, failed to do so, and said a good word for the abominated Cochita.

Like a flash of lightning a suspicion entered the brain of Corporal Billy.

"That was no white man! *It was Cochita himself!* He played it low down on me, but I'm not through with him yet!"

CHAPTER XXXI

“NEVER! NO, NEVER!”

THE murmur of voices in the trail had hardly ceased, when Mrs. Goodale recalled that she and her niece had started to leave the spot, and were checked by the unexpected sounds.

“We shall have no better opportunity; let us hurry.”

“But which way shall we go? Danger lies in every direction.”

“Away from Cochita; since you are so timid, wait here for a minute, while I investigate. It may have been one of our friends with whom he talked; it will not take me long to find out.”

The act was one of those impulsive ones in which the wisest women sometimes indulge before stopping to think of the consequences. Although the aunt had restrained her niece from using her revolver when she first attempted to do so, she was impatient over her

reluctance to appeal to it again. Had the elder held the weapon she would have employed it against Cochita long before. She was displeased, too, over Minnie's hesitancy in trying to escape from the custody of Cochita, but it was the hope rather than the belief that their friends were within call that led her to do a thing which she regretted the moment she was out of sight of her relative.

Her theory was that if in the brief walk she encountered any Apache, it must be Cochita, to whom she could explain that she had become alarmed over his prolonged absence, and had set out to learn the cause. If she should meet those of her own race, a thousand-fold better.

The most trying situation was that of Minnie Goodale. She stood with her weapon grasped in her right hand, peering into the shadows, and closely listening for the sounds that would tell her something concerning her aunt.

“We should not have parted even for a brief time; aunty has no weapon, and she may be seen by other Apaches—”

Something touched her arm, and with a gasp she turned her head. Cochita stood at

her elbow. Strange, too, he had come from the opposite direction.

"Where is she?" he asked in his modulated whisper, alluding to the one who was absent.

"We heard voices up the trail; my aunt thought they might be friends; she has gone to learn the truth."

"She has gone to her death!" was the startling comment of Cochita.

"Why do you say that?"

"Because it is true; it proves which was the wiser when I told her to wait till I returned. The one with whom I spoke was Artoka, my friend. He came to warn me that three of Geronimo's warriors are waiting up the trail for us. They found out by which way we are fleeing and mean to slay us as soon as we come within sight of them."

"Will not Artoka warn her of her danger?"

"No, for he does not love your people; he is *my* friend; if she rushes to her own death, he will not put forth his hand to draw her back. Besides, after Artoka gave me warning, he hurried off; he is needed elsewhere."

Minnie would have swooned could she have put faith in the awful words of her escort. As it was, the doubt almost overcame her.

Cochita laid his hand upon her arm. She angrily shook him off. She had come to detest him unspeakably, for in that moment she was certain that all here aunt had said about the Apache was true. None the less, she must dissemble for a while.

He saw her mood, and did not resent it.

"We cannot linger for an instant. Your aunt is doomed; I will give my life to keep you from harm, but where our enemies are on every hand, even I cannot save you."

"What shall we do?"

"Leave all to me."

The hand of Minnie which held the revolver was hidden in the folds of her dress. She slipped the weapon into her pocket, hoping he had forgotten that she possessed the weapon.

As if to give point to what he had just said, Cochita moved down the trail opposite the course taken by Mrs. Goodale. He did not try to take the arm of his charge, for he remembered the rebuff of a moment before. The fact that he placed himself directly in front of the girl looked as if he either believed she had no means of harming any one, or, having such means, had no disposition to injure him.

It filled her with anguish to turn away from her aunt in her dreadful extremity, when the other lacked a weapon with which to protect herself, but there was no help for it. She could not aid her, and even if she attempted to turn back, Cochita would not permit it. She affected a submission, prayed, and bided her time.

Despite the haste of Cochita, she noted that he advanced with the utmost caution. He stepped lightly and crouched low, as if trying to penetrate the gloom before him. Minnie imitated his light step, though not always with the same success. Could she have believed that anything was to be accomplished by purposely making a noise, she would have made it, but she was restrained through the fear that it might be as much to her interest to preserve silence as it was to her escort.

As the trying minutes passed, her hope that all had gone well with her aunt grew. Had she been slain by the Apaches who, Cochita said, were lying in wait, the reports of their guns would have been heard. Had other means been employed, some outcry would have reached the ears of her niece. Minnie no longer doubted that Cochita had tried to de-

ceive her. Had the two fled when the thought first came to them, they would have been safe by this time.

In a torture of anguish as to what she ought to do in the unparalleled circumstances, the girl once more stealthily drew her revolver, but kept it screened in the folds of her dress. She reflected that nothing was easier than to shoot down the villain walking a few paces in front of her, but she could not bring herself to do the deed. Then she thought of turning and fleeing in the other direction. She knew he would be after her like a flash, but then she would be nerved to do that which now seemed beyond her power.

In the midst of these tormenting musings, Cochita halted so abruptly that, had she not been on the alert, she would have touched him, but she paused with a couple of paces between them. That he had heard something she did not doubt, for he had proved his superior acuteness in that respect.

But he must have decided that he was mistaken, or the danger had passed, for he said:

"You have seen how we have turned back; we were forced to do so; I fear you will have to walk to your ranch."

"My aunt and I told you this afternoon we were anxious to do that, and begged your permission, but you would not consent."

"For the best of reasons; we shall have the hardest kind of work to get out of the mountains; you have seen something of the difficulty yourself."

"Why not let me try to find my friends without your aid?"

"Because my love will not permit you to do that which is sure to have but the one termination."

"If you do your best, that is all that can be asked."

"If I try and fail, and you succeed without help from me, shall I have the same reward?"

"I do not understand your question; this is no time for such things."

"It is just the time; I must have your answer. Suppose some of your friends take you from me, will that not be considered the same as if I did all I could to restore you to them?"

It was a strange question, but Minnie felt safe in answering:

"I and my friends will so consider it."

"My love for you urges me to beg you to repeat the pledge made to me earlier this evening."

"What pledge do you mean?"

"Why do you affect to misunderstand me? The time has come to warn you that I shall stand no further trifling."

"I surely fail to understand you, Cochita. It is easy to explain yourself."

He did so, stepping closer to her, and fixing his black eyes upon her face with an intensity which she felt even in the gloom, and from which she recoiled.

"To-night, when you were sitting beside your aunt, with her holding your head, I told you I must have an answer to my question: whether, if I succeeded in delivering you to your friends, you would promise to become my wife. The question was repeated, and twice you answered 'Yes.' Do you mean to withdraw that promise?"

Minnie understood it all.

"It was not I who answered, Cochita; I had sunk in slumber for a few minutes. You say the word 'Yes' was uttered twice. No doubt that is true, but each time it was spoken by my

aunt, who has never given me a hint of anything of the kind."

"Then I repeat the question, and you shall answer for yourself."

"And without a moment's hesitation, I do so; you have asked me if I will become your wife, and my answer is—*no! never! never!*"

"Then you shall never become the wife of another! You shall not see another sunrise! If Cochita can love, he can also hate. You may have a minute to bid good-bye in your mind to your friends, and then—"

The Apache had spoken in low tones, but their intensity was fearful. There could be no mistaking his deadly meaning.

"I do not want the minute," replied the brave girl. "Take a single step nearer, or make a movement to draw a weapon, and that moment shall be your last! I do not wish to shoot you, Cochita, but it depends upon yourself."

The delicate hand flashed up in front, and Cochita found himself looking into the muzzle of a revolver which was held as firm and immovable as if the muscles which leveled the weapon were iron.

CHAPTER XXXII

THE REUNION

WHAT do you suppose Cochita the Apache did when he found the muzzle of a leveled revolver within a couple of feet of his nose?

Without a word, he turned on his heel and started down the trail at a lope. But let justice be done the miscreant; it was not due to fear of the young woman who, driven at bay, would have carried out her threat had he given her the first pretext for doing so. That wonderful hearing of the young chief had told him that a third person was approaching the spot. Indeed, he was so near that Minnie Goodale not only saw but recognized him. He was Geronimo, who, despite his knowledge that the United States cavalry were in the mountains and threatening his band, took time to hunt out the young rival whom he hated more than he ever hated any Caucasian.

The girl did not tarry a second after she identified the new arrival. She knew what a meeting between the two meant, and had no wish to witness it. She turned and ran rapidly up the trail in the direction taken by her aunt a short time before. She kept her weapon in hand, for there was no saying at what moment she would need it.

"Bless my soul! who are you? what does this mean?"

It was Corporal Billy Bidwell who stepped from the shadows and confronted her with lowered carbine.

"Oh, you are a friend!" exclaimed the half-fainting fugitive; "will you save me?"

"I can't say that you look as if you need much saving, but I shouldn't wonder now if you are the Miss that a young fellow not far from here is looking for. Are you Miss Goodale?"

"Yes," was the faint reply; "what do you mean by your words?"

Instead of answering the question, the Corporal turned his head and called in a guarded voice:

"Say, you young tenderfoot, come out here and tell me whether you have ever seen this young lady before."

A tall, sturdy youth bounded forward in such haste that he stumbled headlong over a small boulder that got in his way.

"Hello, Minnie!"

"O, Bob! God be thanked!"

And brother and sister rushed into each other's arms, while the grinning Corporal looked on.

"I guess they don't need any introduction. See here, you folks; I don't like to butt in, but we are all in a ticklish position, and I beg to suggest that you wait a little while before asking and answering too many questions."

"Have you seen anything of aunty?", suddenly asked Minnie, as she released herself from her brother's embrace.

"No; what has become of her?"

"I think she is safe," replied Corporal Billy; "I can soon learn."

He emitted a couple of whistles, and, as if in response, Arizona Alf emerged from the gloom up the trail.

"Hiram and Micah and Mrs. Goodale are a little way off," was his gratifying salutation; "she had a pretty close call, but her only distress is over you. I'll soon set that right."

And on his part, he uttered a similar signal, to which the ranchman himself responded, the sounds showing that their friends were near at hand.

At the same moment, the reports of several guns were heard to the eastward. The Corporal, who was listening closely, said:

"That's good."

"Why?" asked Arizona Alf.

"All the hostiles are off there; they're going to get out of the mountains, in spite of all the captain can do; they're heading south now. You'll find none of 'em in your path; the way is clear. Do you know the trails in this part of the world?"

"Like a book."

"That being so, you don't need any help from any of us."

Addressing Bob, he added:

"Keep up the path till you meet your friends; you won't have to travel far. I want Alf to go with me a little way; you can wait for him."

The Corporal spoke with so much assurance that none doubted what he said. While the brother and sister hurried up the path, the two men went the opposite way.

"I want to find out about that scamp Cochita," explained the Corporal to his companion; he played the cutest kind of a trick on me, and I would give a good deal to even up things with him. From what the girl told us, he and Geronimo had a scrimmage not far off. What a fine thing, Alf, it would be if we could bag 'em both!"

"Wouldn't it? But I'm afeared it can't be done."

A few minutes later and all became clear. It proved to be as Corporal Billy suspected: while the United States troopers were closing in on the hostiles, Geronimo, in his flaming anger against his young rival, had lingered until he could hunt him out and settle the account between them. The struggle was probably as brief as it was desperate. Cochita had made his last raid, and his victor was hurrying from the spot and already beyond reach. He was too wise to make a serious fight in the mountains, and, with his ponies, women, and children, was pushing south with all the haste possible, and with a success which made every raid by the Apaches of the Southwest a source of wonder to the pursuing cavalry.

"I can't stay longer," said the Corporal; "I ought to be with the boys this minute. The way is clear for you and your friends. Good-bye."

And the brave fellow was gone.

The others made their way to where their ponies were found undisturbed, refreshed and renewed from their rest and nourishment. Arizona Alf took the lead, though they soon reached a point where everything was familiar to the other men. Bob Goodale lifted his sister to the pony, she seating herself behind him, and holding herself in place by passing her arm about his waist. Hiram Goodale did the same with his wife, and as the procession filed out of the mountain spur it headed toward the stage station of Corlita, where all knew a warm welcome awaited them from Zeke Connor. Daylight was at hand when they reached his adobe home.

Zeke told his friends that the Apaches passed close to his house and fired several shots, but they were in too great a hurry to make a serious attack. The old man had gotten wind of the raid, and the failure of Jud Staples to arrive with the stage left no doubt in his mind of the poor fellow's fate.

All parties rested at Connor's. They slept until the sun was well up in the sky, when they ate, and resumed their journey to the home of Hiram Goodale, thankful indeed that while it had gone ill with so many, they had escaped a horrible fate.

You will recall that when the father of Minnie Goodale gave her permission to accompany her aunt to their distant home, it was with the order that at the end of a week she and her brother were to start for the East, and neither had a thought of disregarding the wishes of their parent.

"I am just beginning to get acquainted with the country," said Bob, as the time drew near for their departure, "and think I could enjoy a few months more; how is it with you, Minnie?"

"I am not so enthusiastic as you," was her reply, as she looked from face to face of the little company gathered under the trees; "I can't say that I'm in love with the climate of Arizona at this season of the year."

"The climate!" laughed her uncle. "Wait a few weeks till the thermometer strikes a hundred and twenty at midnight and a hundred and thirty or forty at midday; then you may speak of the weather as being *warm*."

"Bob, think of the cool woods, the swimming pool, and the breezy nights at home. If it were winter, I could like it here, but I prefer to spend my summers somewhere else. Then, too," she added, "we have no Geronimo or Cochita to trouble us there."

"Neither of them will trouble us again; Cochita because he isn't able, and Geronimo because General Crook will draw his fangs this time. I'm mighty glad, by the way, that your father doesn't know a thing of what you have been through."

"The first he learns of it will be from us," said Bob; "we can dress up matters to suit our fancy."

"They won't need much dressing up," suggested the aunt; "few women have passed through what befell Minnie and me, and lived to tell of it."

"Well, I ought to be satisfied," observed Bob, as he looked around with a sigh, half of regret. "Father has been good to us, and now I'm ready to enter college and buckle down to work."

So the joyous youth bade his friends good-bye, without the remotest expectation of setting foot again in Arizona for several years

to come. By one of those strange freaks of fortune, however, which occur oftener in this life than is supposed, he became involved some months later in a series of experiences fully as startling as those through which he had just passed.

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